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# A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED:

BEING A SEQUEL

TO "THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD."

BY

GILLAN VASE.

IN THREE VOLS.

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VOL I.

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London:

REMINGTON AND CO.,

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1878.

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Telford-Johnson, 11 Mar. 1952.

## P R E F A C E .

IN consideration of the circumstance that this book is but the continuation of another, it has been deemed advisable that I should issue it with a few prefatory words.

I am well aware that this ambitious attempt of mine, to finish a work commenced by one of England's most illustrious writers, will be almost sure to meet with opposition; and, very likely, my audacious venture may be punished either by having to run the gauntlet of sharpest criticism, or—a thousand times worse—being passed over in contemptuous silence.

Yet there is one thing encourages me to hope for something better, and it is this: I believe Englishmen to be too just in the aggregate to condemn any one, however weak and feeble, unheard.

To that sense of justice, I appeal, therefore. If, after my book has been read, it is condemned, I accept the verdict.

Let me relate how it was that I came to write it.

It is some years ago now since I first read the fragment of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." It so deeply interested me that though my regret was keen that it could never be finished by the great man who had commenced it, I still hoped some one else—some one of his many literary friends, perhaps—would gather up the broken threads and weave the story to its end.

But I was disappointed. The story, so full of promise, was left a fragment; and, at last, weary of waiting, I began to solve the Mystery for myself.

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I had only written a few chapters, just for my own amusement and the gratification of a few kindly interested friends, to whose encouragement I owed the stimulus which gave the impulse, when something, I had not known until then that I possessed, stirred within me—something strangely like ambition. I soon discovered, almost to my consternation, that I had idly entered on a road from which there is no turning back, even though only the grisly hag disappointment should be in waiting at the end. I had raised a monster which took possession of me, body and soul. For, who ever takes up an author's pen, however thoughtlessly, is very soon, not its master but its slave.

In this manner my book advanced towards completion, and at last, has passed out of its embryo stage and become a living thing. Full of trembling hope, full of fear, I place it in the hands of the public. In a few short weeks I shall know whether it has strength to live, or whether it must die.

I venture to advance one plea for consideration.

Although born, and, to a certain degree, educated in England, I am, from long sojourn in a foreign land, almost half a foreigner, except in unchangeable love and affection for my native country, and I therefore beg some indulgence for any peculiarity of language or style, which I may, perhaps, unconsciously have adopted. The accents of my Fatherland sounded to me a short time ago—I hear them so seldom—almost as strange, as pleasantly familiar, in the streets of London.

GILLAN VASE.

Hanover, July 12th, 1878.

# A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED.

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## CHAPTER I.

SOME OF MR. CHRISPARKLE'S WAKING THOUGHTS  
AND DREAMING FANCIES.

SERVICE is over—the early morning service—in the old Cathedral of the ancient city of Cloisterham, and the few who have composed the small congregation are rapidly dispersing in various directions, when one of the Minor Canons thereof, Mr. Chrisparkle, to wit, coming slowly and meditatively—unlike his wont—out of that sacred edifice, stumbles over something lying crouched up on the ground at his feet; and saving himself with a start from the imminent danger of falling forward on his face, nearly goes to the other extreme of falling on his back.

Now for one who prides himself—and with reason—on the keenness of his vision, such a mishap, barely averted, is trying, to say the least; and when further aggravated by the cause, which grins up at you, delighted at your discomfiture, raising, at the same time,

a stone threateningly, is very trying. The Minor Canon has a fine temper, but he loses (or rather, let us say, mislays) it for the nonce, as, looking down upon the something, and the dirty, threatening hand, he says, sternly—

“What are you doing here, and what do you mean by lying right in my way like that? Get up directly, and make off with you. You ought to be ashamed to throw stones in the very precincts of the Cathedral.”

“What I’m a doin’ here?” says the ragged urchin, who calls himself Deputy; “a purty question that, for a clargyman and a minor canon! Haint I as much right to go to the Kinfreederal as you yourself? What do *you* mean by a falling over me, and a kickin’ my shins, without so much as a widdy warning? I’m man-servant in attendance on Her Royal ’Ighness, the Princess Puffer, and I’m a waiting here fur to conduct her ’ome.”

And Deputy, sharp-eyed and fleet of foot, slips past Mr. Chrisparkle, and disappears round a corner, where a miserably-attired and trembling old woman has preceded him, leaving the astonished Minor Canon to pursue the even, and now uninterrupted, tenor of his way to his happy home in Minor Canon Corner.



Pondering still, though now with wide open and attentive eyes, Mr. Chrisparkle, in the course of a few minutes, and without further accident, duly arrives at the cozy home, upon the threshold of which he is accustomed to throw away all disagreeables of any kind whatever. Casting off, therefore, metaphorically, the dust of Deputy, and, literally, the dust from the Cathedral Close, upon the mat at the door, the good Minor Canon calls up a smile to his lips, assumes his usually elastic tread, and, humming a portion of the anthem so beautifully sung that morning by Mr. Jasper, the choir-master, and his choir, softly opens the dining-room door, whereupon his nose is immediately welcomed by a mixture of Mocha, rasher and chop perfume, deliciously blended; and he himself by a charming little old lady, daintily attired as a china shepherdess, and radiant to behold.

“Hullo, ma,” says the reverend gentleman, stooping his tall head to salute this dainty bit of china on both rosy cheeks, “here we are at last, hungry, hearty, and all the rest of it; in short, ready to do our duty, in the way of disposing of the breakfast”—to the old lady’s greatest satisfaction.

To his surprise, the colour deepens somewhat stormily on the cheeks he has been

kissing, and the flash which darts out of her bright eyes as quick as lightning, has something of lightning quality besides its quickness, and she is tossing her head until the strings of her snowy cap wave behind her like indignant sprites.

“Why, ma, dear?”

“Don’t tell *me*, Sept. And if the coffee is cold, and the eggs hard, and the rasher tallowy, don’t blame me either, and don’t blame the cook.”

“My dearest ma!”

“And whatever you do, my dear,” continues the old lady, with an indignant and emphatic cap, “don’t try to deceive me, for you never can, nor will. You never did deceive me, even when you were a little fellow in petticoats. Ah, you forget it, but I do not! How one day you came to confess some childish fault for which you had been threatened with punishment, and took your whipping like a man. You were five years old then, Sept, and now you are thirty-five; don’t begin to deceive me now.”

“I’m sure, ma, dear,” says the Revd. Sept, with a pleasant smile, “that the temptation to deceive you even now would be as slight as it was then. Your penetration would surely find me out, and the whipping

was no doubt as soft and gentle as the dear hands that gave it."

"Don't wander away from the point, Sept," interposes the old lady, who hasn't come to it herself at all, but has been keeping her patient son totally in the dark as to the cause of her disturbance, "but tell me without any more circumvention what has happened to vex you; for that something has, even my old eyes are still sharp enough to see."

"If you allude, ma, dear," says her innocent son, busy now in disposing of the fragrant coffee, and cutting, from time to time, huge slices from the home-baked bread upon the platter, "if you allude to the hideous small boy, over whom I nearly fell coming out of the Cathedral, and who, for the moment, gave me a turn—I confess it—then you have the secret, and I would scorn to hide it from you."

"Pooh, pooh! Don't try to put me off, Sept. You hadn't seen any hideous small boy in London, I suppose, or had seen so many that they lost their effect upon you, and you brought a load upon your heart home from London, Sept. You took that load with you to the Cathedral, and you haven't left it there, in spite of your singing and your brisk step. From your earliest

infancy, your mind was always an open book for me ; don't, don't shut it up now."

Here the old lady's voice falters, and the tears rise to her bright eyes.

Now, the good Minor Canon is so dissatisfied and troubled by this unusual and terrible sight, that he is for the moment capable of inventing almost any load, to give his mother the satisfaction of believing she can take it away. If it had been any bodily ailment, now—toothache, headache, pain in the back ; but an imaginary load at the heart ! And the truth is, that her sharp eyes and keen motherly instincts have not deceived her ; the Rev. Sept had returned from the City, with a mind full of troubled thoughts, haunting him like tormenting imps, and refusing to be exorcised.

Therefore, a short pause ensues, ere the son slowly and hesitatingly speaks—

"You may be sure, ma, that you would be the first I should open my heart to on any and every occasion ; and if on this one point I have kept it closed, it is because, unfortunately, ma, you and I differ very much about it."

The old lady rises, rings the bell, paces up and down the room in a hurried and nervous manner while the neat maid-servant

clears away the now finished breakfast, and when it is accomplished, closes and locks the door to prevent interruption. Then, drawing a chair close to her son, and seating herself determinately upon it, she fixes her bright eyes keenly upon his agitated and troubled face, and speaks to this effect—

“Now that the plunge is made, and the ice broken, Sept, let me hear the whole. I don’t agree with you, and I tell you so beforehand; I do differ from you, and you may as well know it to begin with; but your troubles are my troubles, and your fears and anxieties must be mine, too. You have been to see Mr. Neville?”

“I have, ma.”

“And you visit him every time you go to London?”

“Certainly I do,” says the Minor Canon, and his troubled face becomes suddenly illuminated with a proud, exultant smile, which vanishes, however, immediately, though not before the anxious, scrutinising eyes of his mother have seized upon it and stored it up for future and careful examination. “Certainly, ma; it is all I can do for him now, poor fellow! But you must not imagine that my troubled thoughts came from him. It would, indeed, be impossible to meet him and

his sister unmoved ; to see how patiently they bear an affliction, so great, so terrible, that it would be no wonder if they utterly succumbed under it. I often preach them patience and endurance," continues Mr. Chrisparkle, with rising anger against himself ; "but I do not believe, put to the proof, I myself should practise the half of it."

The china shepherdess here mutters something about sin bringing its own punishment ; but her voice is unsteady, and if the Minor Canon had not been so occupied with his own thoughts, he would have seen a tear sparkling on her eyelash.

"To think," pursues the Rev. Sept, after a short pause, "of so much youth and beauty, so much intelligence and manly hope, blighted with a deadly bann upon the very portals of a new life ; to think of their being driven away, outcasts from the only friends who love them ; watched, and harassed, and threatened darkly by a foe, who will not meet them face to face. And to bear all this and be innocent, —for upon my soul, the lad is innocent !—were it not enough to drive them to despair ? And yet, all the gold in that boy's nature is being ten times refined in the fiery furnace of affliction, and as for his sister—"

Here the radiant smile appears again on the

lips of the Minor Canon, and brightens his eyes; but this time it is lost on his mother, whose own eyes are cast down and clouded by thickly-falling tears. She quickly wipes them away, however, and not to expose herself to the bare supposition of having changed her mind, says—

“Then what is the reason of your being so sad and troubled (when I’m not looking at you) and so unlike yourself, Sept, since it is not that?”

The dark trouble settles down again upon the good man’s face, making it appear ten years older in a moment, and in an agitated and uncertain manner, and in a low voice, as if afraid of his own thoughts, the Minor Canon speaks—

“A horrible suspicion has sprung up in my mind, ma; a suspicion so horrible that, without proof to confirm it, it would be a sin to utter it, even to you. It seems a sin to have conceived it, and yet it suddenly came to me, almost like an inspiration, and having come, seemed again to be the result of some occult and hidden reasoning, which my mind had been carrying on unconsciously for months, and not to be argued with or cast away. God grant I may be wrong,” says the Minor Canon, rising and shaking himself, as if to

shake off the melancholy thoughts which have so overshadowed his usually bright and sunny nature ; and then, catching a glimpse of his mother's anxious and terrified face, he adds, laughing—

“ I must take a run, ma, in the fresh air. You see I get my melancholy fits, as well as other people ; but I know a cure—a fresh air cure. I shall come back in half an hour as fresh as a bee, ‘ gathering honey from every opening flower.’ ”

Humming cheerfully, to complete the metaphor, the Rev. Sept is in full trot before the dear old china shepherdess has had time to resort to her infallible closet for his support, leaving her looking wistfully after him from the doorstep, her right hand shading her bright eyes from the still brighter sunlight.

Once more he looks back, laughing and nodding, and then, turning a corner, disappears from her sight. He slackens his pace a little then, but the cure is working ; the fresh, sweet air is slowly restoring his mind to its usual balance.

Leaving the town, he continues his walk through rich corn fields, where the deep green of summer is ripening into the first golden tint of autumn.

The dawn has kept its promise, and is



ushering in glorious noon. Not a cloud is in the bright blue sky. Not a murmur in the still air. Even the corn hangs its golden head, as if in prayerful ecstasy. The busy birds have ceased their song, and, hiding themselves in thick foliage, rest from their labours.

Mr. Chrisparkle seats himself upon a low bank under a hedge, where honeysuckle and wild rose vie with each other in pouring out delicious perfume. With the golden corn before him, the sweet-scented summer air around him, and the deep blue heaven above, what wonder if his thoughts come out of the darkness, when they are not at home, to the light, where they are.

He thinks of his happy childhood, watched over by tender love ; of his happy manhood, where his work is his pleasure and recreation too. And then a strange new happiness rises before him—a happiness so strange, so intense, that he trembles before it.

Dark, earnest eyes look gratefully into his ; tender lips smile upon him. And with the same radiant light brightening his face, which his mother had seen, and is still wondering at, in her little parlour at home, he feels the same warm lips touch his hand. A thrill passes through him, and the apparition

vanishes ; but only to give place to others. He sees the lost youth ; pale, haggard, but with a fixed determination upon his face and a steady meaning in his stern eyes, and he hears the spoken words—

“The dawn has arisen, the noontide is come, and the end is not far off. Behold, I am not dead but alive to take vengeance on my would-be murderer.”

Then he vanishes, too, and the Cathedral rises before him, grim, dark, mysterious ; and his mother, and Mrs. Tope, and Jasper, and Deputy, fantastically pieced together, all pass before his mental vision, now taking distinct form, now vanishing, to reappear again and again.

Meanwhile, the sun rises higher and higher, and at last sends his burning rays so direct into Mr. Chrisparkle’s face that he awakes with a start.

“Bless my heart and soul !” he exclaims, “nearly one o’clock, and I’ve been sleeping here like a runaway schoolboy ; and what curious dreams ! and what will ma say !” So apostrophising himself, the Rev. Sept gets up and sets off at a sharp pace, disappearing in the direction of Minor Canon Corner.

## CHAPTER II.

MR. DATCHERY SHOWS HIMSELF IN A NEW LIGHT.

THE Very Revd. the Dean was both surprised and perplexed, though, as he declared to Mrs. Dean—

“Not quite so surprised, as perplexed, perplexed. For, my dear, how are we in so short a time, to find a substitute? And even with time before us, such a choir-master is not so easily to be found again; such voice! such expression! so attentive too, and punctual in attendance—in short, in every respect so unexceptionable. A sad calamity for a man, though, a very sad calamity!”

Now that the Dean comes to think of it, he is not surprised at all that Mr. Jasper should wish to give up his situation as choir-master, and go to London. He had declared that he could not remain any longer in Cloisterham; the very air he breathed there, every note he sung there, every corner in the town, and every nook in the Cathedral, reminded him—here he had choked and become deadly pale; but the Dean had understood him; yes, the Dean had understood him per-

fectly, and had felt for him deeply; poor man! poor man! His salary was not the object to him it had been; the lawyer from London had communicated with him, and informed him that certain moneys, which would have been handed over to his lost nephew on his coming of age—the words brought out in a spasmodic way, and with the same deadly paleness—were at his disposal, as the only near relative. He had begged the Dean as a personal favour to supply his place as soon as possible, and of course the Dean could not refuse him; though, as he said before, “he was grieved to part with him, grieved and perplexed.”

Thus the Dean, sitting cosily with Mrs. Dean, in the cool of the evening, in the verandah at the back of the Deanery, and speaking in that tone of lazy, cheerful discontent, becoming and natural to an after-dinner Dean; with such a glorious vista before him of sunny peaches and apricots, and mellowing plums, and blushing apples, in such quantity and quality as only were to be found in that Deanery garden, hidden from profane eyes by high walls, and only accessible to the favoured few, who were honoured in Cloisterham by the general and significant title of “those who visited at the

Deanery." Thus the Dean, and the opinions expressed by him on this occasion, were echoed that same evening through all Cloisterham. Every one related it to somebody else, and though occasional variations were observable, the echo remained pretty faithful to its original. All had felt sure that he would not and could not remain. He had taken the loss of his nephew too much to heart, poor fellow! he was quite an altered man since then. Always still and reserved, he had become so much stiller, and so much more reserved, that his voice was seldom heard except in the choir.

"He had grown as thin as a skeleton," said tearful Mrs. Tope, relating the news to her lodger, Mr. Datchery, who took little notice of it, remarking indifferently—

"What did it matter to a buffer, whether this or that master led the choir," but supper being over, and Mrs. Tope departed, he added one thick stroke to his reckoning behind the door, and then taking up his hat, strolled out into the Cathedral Close. It was already dark, and light was shining out from the Gate House window, so that Mr. Datchery could distinctly see the figure of a man passing to and fro inside,—Mr. Jasper, doubtless, perhaps already making preparations for de-

parture. With a perplexed face, Mr. Datchery watched him, until aroused by feeling something hit him from behind. Turning round sharply, he became aware of Deputy, who was dancing behind him in great glee, and exclaimed, angrily—

“ Ah, you young vagabond, are you going to make a mark for your stones of me. You had better leave off that game, I can tell you.”

“ ‘Ere’s a row,” said Deputy, “ just because I give you one as a widdy warning. I want’s to speak to you, and I don’t want for ’im to hear,” shaking his fist angrily in the direction of the shadow on the blind. “ I’ve been a watchin’ of ’im for the last arf-a-hour, while I’ve been a waitin’ for you, and now you comes a rowin’ and a scandalizin’ of me like that. It’s ’arrowin’ to the feelin’s of a chap,” said Deputy, rubbing both dirty eyes with his dirty fists, and pretending to be bitterly hurt, while all the while, he sharply scanned Mr. Datchery between his fingers, and mentally calculated how much he might get out of him.

“ Come, come,” said Mr. Datchery, good-humouredly, “ out with it, Winks, what have you got to tell me? A shilling will make us good friends again, will it not?”

“ A arf-a-crown,” whimpered Deputy, “ I’ve

injured my 'ealth a findin' of it out. 'Er Royal 'Ighness is confounded hard to badger. I'd tried every dodge and a'most given it up. I told her she reminded me of my dead and gone mother, who died o' whisky, after 'avin nearly broke every bone of my body (this for the private information of Mr. Datchery) and that I'd come and see her in London. She didn't bite to that fly at all. I didn't remind her of her dead and gone son, and she didn't receive no wisitors, except in a business way."

"Well, well," put in Mr. Datchery, impatiently, "did you find it out at last?"

"Wait a bit," continued Winks, "you're a comin' to it a deal faster than I did. I was dead beat, and afeared you'd come too short this time, Dick, but when she set out to walk back to the station, all mumblin' and totterin', I made up my mind not to lose the last chance, and follered her."

"Hoping to hitch it out of her on the road, eh, Winks?"

"At a convenient distance," went on Deputy, gravely, "lookin' out for the chance of pickin' of it up; a mindful of my promise and a reckonin' on your gratitood."

"Not in vain, Winks, old boy!" said Mr. Datchery with a laugh, "I'm an inquisitive

old buffer, and I've got the means of gratifying my curiosity; the woman interests me; I've a notion of making a call upon her, when I go up to town; she seems one of the right sort for mixing the opium pipe, and for a buffer, who's nothing on earth to do; anything that turns up is a godsend."

Winks, who during these few remarks, had been profusely illustrating his name, now put his thumb to his nose, and widened his fingers towards his friend, with every sign of contempt and derision; then with a laugh, which seemed to proceed from his stomach, his mouth being totally unaffected by it, he replied—

"Don't take no trouble to waste none of your chaff on me, Dick, for I sees thro' yer as through a winder-pane."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Datchery, angrily, "what an offshoot of the devil it is! Why don't you tell me what I want without more ado? I know you found out at last, and it don't matter to you *why* I want to know."

"She become so tottery on her pins," pursued Winks, with immovable gravity, "that at last she broke down on a stone by the road, and began to cough and to spit quite dreadful; then she closed her eyes and fell to mumblin'. Creepin' up to her, I says,



soft like, 'where am I to come to, mother dear, when I wants a pipe? You've clean forgot to tell me that, and without it, you know, I shall have to go to Jack Chinaman.' I'd heer'd her mumblin' some'at about Jack Chinaman, and so I said it at a venture. Lor! she were quite lively in a moment. 'Don't go to Jack Chinaman, deary,' she says, 'cause he's much dearer than I am, and he don't know neither the right mixin' of it as I do; come to me, deary; to Mother Coombes in Purgatory Court, No 162, down by the river.' She kept on a mumblin' and a coughin', but I didn't wait to hear no more, and there's your answer, Dick, and now I only ask you to fork out my arf-a-crown."

"There it is, and now make off with you," said Mr. Datchery. "I've something to do before night, and I must have time to do it in. Stay," he added suddenly, "you may still help me. Watch that man there till I come back, and if he leaves the house, you follow him, and find out where he goes. You may earn another shilling to-night, Winks, if you are sharp, and more shillings in the future; you understand?"

Deputy gave a significant and quick sign of comprehension and assent, and shook one dirty fist again in the direction of the shadow.

In the other was closely clenched his half-a-crown ; yet, between his defiant growls for Mr. Jasper, and his congratulatory chuckles for himself, he did not fail to observe that Mr. Datchery, behind him, was copying his actions with even increased vehemence. Indeed, this latter gentleman seemed, for some unaccountable reason, to be stepping completely out of his *rôle* of easy-going buffer, and to take a keen and curious interest in the actions and whilom doings of the shadow, who, in bodily form, called himself John Jasper, choir-master.

For although he had spoken of hurry and work to do, he still lingered, as if in fascination, and smiled a grim smile as the shadow shook its fist too, as if threatening the unseen enemy, and taking up the gauntlet, hurled at it ; upon which, Deputy, observant of everything connected with his post, threw such a volley of imaginary stones, that the shadow succumbed before them, and retreated farther into the room, until lost to view ; whereupon Mr. Datchery hastily withdrew, and Deputy, like some savage Indian, danced a wild dance of ecstasy at the enemy's discomfiture, throwing his head and body and limbs into such awful and astonishing positions, that a servantmaid, crossing the Close to fetch her

young mistress from a dancing-party, fled in dismay, reporting afterwards to her fellow-servants, that the devil himself had appeared in bodily form before her, on his way home from the church-yard, where he had, no doubt, been performing his unholy office of removing the souls of the lost into the place appointed for them.

And John Jasper, the threatened; John Jasper, the regretted; John Jasper, the indispensable—late professor of music in the ancient city of Cloisterham, and leader of the Cathedral choir—what of him? If the devil had not been dancing before his house that evening, he had most surely been present in its interior, standing in almost palpable form beside its wretched inmate, and pointing, with a shadowy hand, to the reckoning that would not balance. Had he not been trying to add it up all that evening, and many a weary evening and day before, and yet, when it seemed nearly finished, only one figure or so more, something had turned it all wrong, and he must begin again at the beginning. How weary he was! How heavy his head! How heavy his heart! Ha! was that the devil who laughed? He *had* a heart; how it throbbed and beat passionately for love of her—or hatred, which was it? Once he had

loved her, how well he remembered that. How, all the week, he had but one thought, one longing, for the hour when he could sit by her side, touch her hand, sometimes even her little foot. How often it came upon the wrong pedal, and then, was it not his duty to put it right? Such a careless little thing, and he such a careful master!

He could praise her, correct her, scold her; anything, *everything*, to make her lift her bright eyes, whether in anger or content. How long he had cherished the hope that she returned his love, when the saucy naughtiness with which she treated her music master—Eddy's uncle—had changed into a steady, childish gravity, not unmixed with fear. How often he had seen her meet his eyes with a look of recognition in them—recognition of what?—of his love, or of her acknowledgment of it? How, at this time, when he touched her hand by accident, or in performance of his duty as her music-master, instead of the pretty, naughty pettishness she had formerly shown, she would draw it away with a shudder, as if in fear, and the bright colour would flush her face, even to the roots of her waving hair. Was not that the working of the troubled conscience that reproached her for treachery to her betrothed? was not

that almost a proof that she returned his love? And, even though the last interview he had had with her had shown him his error in this respect, had revealed to him so distinctly that miscomprehension was impossible, her shuddering abhorrence of him, could he give her up? No!—a thousand times, No!—a million times, No! No devil in hell, no God in heaven, should make him leave her to another!

Smiting himself upon the breast, anon cursing himself and cursing her, anon pressing her picture passionately to his heart, so the wretched man passed the slow hours of the weary night.

Deputy and Mr. Datchery, always on the watch, saw the light, the steady light, ever burning in the Gate House. The grey morning peeping in, revealed a motionless form, haggard and worn out with watching and passion, and, drawing back in alarm, shrouded her pale face in dense fog, and wept slow, pitying tears. Finally, Mrs. Tope, all bustle, and broom, and duster, coming in, was “that shocked” at beholding her honoured Mr. Jasper so prostrate, that, as she afterwards said, you might have knocked her down with a feather.

“Lord ha mercy on us!” was her first

terrified exclamation, then, prompt in action, she had assisted Mr. Jasper to his easy chair, and was moistening his pale forehead with water, before he had time to become fully conscious of her presence. “ ‘There, there!’ ” said the good woman, patting him as if he were a baby, “ ‘you are coming round nicely now; a few drops of wine will set you all right again,’ ” and hastening to a small side-board behind the door, she poured out a glass of strong wine and held it to his lips. A faint colour flushed his face, and, with a slight motion of his hand, he indicated the open boxes and things scattered about, as if to account for his condition.

But Mrs. Tope—bless her heart!—knew all about it, and her busy woman’s tongue was already supplying all deficiencies in his explanation.

“ ‘Lord bless you, sir, *I* know! what with a packin’ up, and what with a thinkin’ of Mr. Edwin, it’s been too much for you. Tope, he’ll bear me witness, that only last night I said to him, ‘Tope,’ says I, ‘I’ll bet you all the money in the parish boxes, and something more—for there ain’t much in ’em—that not one half an eye does Mr. Jasper close this live-long night.’ It ain’t no wonder either, for a sweeter young gentleman, or a kinder,

never lived, and many's the tear I've shed, as Tope will certify to, for him and for you, sir ; but, if you'll excuse my takin' the liberty for to say it, we must all try not to fret and worry ourselves too much, even when the trouble's very hard to bear. It ain't no mortal use, the grave will never give up its dead."

What was that, glancing out sinister from the half-closed eyes of the pale occupant of the easy chair ? What devil was that, hissing and triumphantly repeating her last words, "the grave will never give up its dead ?" Whatever it was, it was gone again in a moment, sinking back into the darkness from whence it had sprung, and leaving no trace of its presence behind. Mrs. Tope could have sworn she had seen and heard it one moment, and the next, almost doubted her own senses. It stopped her chatter, however, and left her staring with foolish, wide-open eyes at the motionless figure opposite her.

"You are very kind and sympathising," said the choir-master feebly, "and I trust and rely on your affection and fidelity to me in all things ; but this is a topic upon which I cannot trust myself to speak ; the wound is still too new ; it hurts too much," and, covering his eyes with his long, thin hand, he sank back in his easy chair, while Mrs. Tope,

a little rebuffed and a little piqued at first, speedily recovered her spirits in the exercise of her household duties.

Bustling in and out, she had soon filled the place with that indescribable something, which a true woman, however humble, always carries about with her. The dark and foul spirits which had haunted the room during the night, feeling their position untenable, retreated further and further from the bright spirit of womanliness, shedding its influence all around, at first concentrating themselves round the solitary occupant of the chair, and then vanishing one by one.

The room became brighter, healthier, freer. Even Mr. Jasper, not insensible to the cheerful influence, let fall the hand shadowing his eyes, and smiled grateful acknowledgment at the verger's wife.

Presently, out of the small kitchen below, issued a savoury odour; coffee perfumed the atmosphere; a snowy cloth decked the table; plate and cup and saucer, and brightly polished knives contributed their part to the completion of a cheerful whole. In a word, and in an incredibly short time, breakfast, neat and dainty, reigned triumphant in the solitary room, and Mr. Jasper, still in his easy chair, was installed chief minister of state.



Before commencing, however, he motioned Mrs. Tope to take the vacant chair beside him.

"Just this once," he pleaded, as she modestly hesitated, "for the first and perhaps the last time, good Mrs. Tope. You have waited upon me so many a time, and now that the place which has known me so well, will soon know me no more, I cannot find it in my heart to take my last meal alone. You have a few minutes to spare, have you not?"

"As for that," said Mrs. Tope, "nothing should have induced me to go, sir, until I had seen you take a few mouthfuls; for it frightened me terrible when I first came in, to see you lying there so still and white; and I couldn't answer it to my conscience to go away and you not fully restored; so if you wishes it, and orders me to set myself beside you, then I will take the liberty, sir, and many thanks for your goodness; and I hope, after all, that you will change your mind and come back to us; for it's a lone place is London, sir, for a lone man, and we shall miss you here sorely, particularly in the Cathedral."

Thus the verger's wife, casting anxious glances from time to time at the choir-master,

who, reviving a little under the influence of the warm and savoury morsels, smiled back at her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Datchery, packed and ready, awaited impatiently the return of Mrs. Tope, in order to inform her that a letter he had received that morning summoned him peremptorily to London; a distant relation, lying dangerously ill, having demanded, in terms impossible to refuse, his presence there; and to pour into her sympathising ears his bitter complaint of what a fatality it was for a single buffer, who denied and utterly abjured all family ties, and who had so completely found his nook in life, where he could hang up his hat for the remainder of his days and live in peace and quietude, to be compelled, positively compelled, again to face the world he hated, and to bore himself with matters which could be of no possible interest to him.

Meanwhile, Deputy, munching a crust, his frugal breakfast, in a corner, and occasionally, with half an eye, making a mark of some early passer by, watched with keen intelligence the door of the Gate House, ready on the faintest sign of movement on the part of its inmate, to report to his friend and ally.

Meanwhile, the grey morning, brightened and cheered by a warm kiss from the sun;

shook off her misty veil, looked out clear and untroubled, and with a cheerful smile upon the old city, rousing itself up for its daily work; peeped in at Miss Twinkleton's windows, where no bright girls faces were to be seen as yet, but where busy housemaids cleaned and rubbed and polished in preparation for their arrival; nodded laughing to the dear old china shepherdess, so trim and tidy, so busy and active, for was not her Sept also going up to London, and his breakfast must be daintily prepared and disposed of also, ere the sun should be an hour further on his course.

And breakfast being over in the Gate House—the two having eaten little, Mr. Jasper being still too feeble and too engrossed with anxious thought, while Mrs. Tope's modesty prevented her doing justice to her usually healthy appetite—the verger's wife packed the portmanteau, which the choir-master had decided on taking with him, and received his instructions concerning the rest of his worldly goods in Cloisterham. Then the two sallied forth, Mr. Jasper propping himself on Mrs. Tope's strong arm, and proceeded in the direction of the coach which was to convey him to the station. Mr. Chrisparkle, having said good-by to his mother, and heartily

saluted her on both rosy cheeks, soon overtook them, and releasing Mrs. Tope, good-naturedly offered his arm to Jasper; but he avoided all unnecessary conversation with him, and fell into so meditative a mood, that the choir-master, furtively watching him, became every moment stiller and sterner. Finally, Mr. Datchery, with his hat in his hand, his snowy locks waving in the gentle breeze, and accompanied by Winks, brought up the rear; but at a convenient distance, where they could neither be seen nor heard by the two before them; in lieu of Mrs. Tope, who had not returned, he had poured out his sorrows into the far less sympathising ears of Mr. Tope, who regretted much more the loss of a lodger than the loss of Mr. Datchery, and characterised him behind his back as “a lumbering old fool, who wanted to sleep through life, instead of taking part in it, as an honest man should.” Thus the three arrived at the omnibus and took their places. Jasper first, kindly assisted by Mr. Chrisparkle, who, however, did not take the seat beside him but at the other end of the vehicle; then, Mr. Datchery, cunningly assisted by Deputy, who, with a volley of oaths and a volley of stones, thrown indiscriminately in every direction, where the two pair

of eyes might look with safety to his friend, paved the way for his slipping unobserved into the seat by the driver, Joe, who nodded his honest head in comprehension of the situation, then, with a mild expostulation from Mr. Chrisparkle, a half muttered curse from between Jasper's clenched teeth, a crack of Joe's whip, a strong pull from the horses, a cloud of dust—Deputy becoming gradually a mere speck in the distance—and rattle, rattle towards the great city, whither they were all bound.

The fog, which had deserted Cloisterham so early, might have been summoned as a reinforcement to an innumerable army of fogs, all bent upon attacking the greater city, and smothering it to death. Going out of the sunshine of Cloisterham, the three men might have noticed, if each had not been so engrossed with his own thoughts (which, could they have been compared, would have shown how strikingly different the same thing may appear from different points of view), how the air became gradually closer and thicker, and how the sun darkened, until finally lost to view. Arriving at last at the great Babel, and being landed upon the crowded platform, the confusion of tongues became more confused, by the air positively refusing to carry

any sound far, and therefore concentrating and thickening it in an irritating and painful manner. Even Mr. Chrisparkle's cheerful good-by sounded so sepulchral through the thick atmosphere, that it might have been a weird and unearthly foreboding of evil. And Mr. Datchery, popping out of the next carriage to the two, with an agility and lightness utterly unaccountable in a buffer so advanced in years, and forgetting his useless and never worn hat, was so caught in the lungs by the inconsiderate and implacable fog, that he only recovered from his fit of coughing, to see Jasper plunge into it, as into a sea, which closed round him and hid him so completely from view that all attempt to follow him would be evidently useless. Let him go, then, let him go down into the darkness to which he belongs! Human and divine retribution are on his track, and will hunt him down at last! Such thoughts as these might have occupied Mr. Datchery's mind, as he stood and stared in the direction where the choir-master had disappeared, until aroused by the "by're leave" of an energetic porter, and then, clapping his hand to his uncovered head, he, too, vanished into the thick darkness and became lost to view.

## CHAPTER III.

MADGE.

IN a dull, quiet street in the North-east of London, in one of a row of houses so alike, that without the numbers on the house doors you would never find out one from another ; where you descend a few stone steps to the kitchen, and ascend a few to the house door ; where the same neat window curtains of almost the same pattern are prevalent in all the row ; and the same sickly geraniums and mignonettes bloom or do not bloom, according to their several constitutions and power of accommodating themselves to circumstances ; where the inhabitants are characterised as hard-working and respectable ; and where chapel-going is the characteristic of the neighbourhood—in such a house were seated, on a certain afternoon about this time, in what was called the back parlour, two people, man and woman, in gloomy silence both ; he, half lying on the small, hard, horsehair sofa ; she, in the window, in order to make the most of the scanty light prevalent in the back parlour, with her sewing.

For some time the only sound in the room is the click-clack of her busy needle. Let us improve the occasion and contemplate them both.

The woman—or, on closer inspection, the girl, for there is a youthful something about her which, in spite of care and wornness, cannot be entirely discarded—is slightly deformed, with high shoulders and rounded back, probably increased by constant application to her needle; her face is very pale and thin, and the mouth, which has a sorrowful and yet patient expression, is firmly closed, indicating a strong will. She is evidently a needlewoman; the steady and constant application to her work in the hot evening showing very plainly the necessity of the bread-earner.

The young man—for he also is young—is remarkable chiefly for a restless and uncertain glance, a troubled look that, as he lies, and from time to time contemplates his companion, deepens into dark and heavy gloom. His face is pale and thin, too; but evidently so from recent and severe illness, for the hand, resting upon the arm of the sofa, is transparently emaciated, and the dark circles round the eyes tell their story of weary, suffering hours. He is the first to break the silence with a smothered groan.



The girl stops her work in a moment, and raises soft, luminous grey eyes, with a world of tender compassion in them ; then, rising, lays her large, cool hand upon his brow.

“You are in pain,” she says, “and suffering. I was afraid this morning that you were attempting more than your strength would allow in going out alone. Let me fetch you a cooling drink, and then lie down and try to sleep. The sun was hot and burning, and it has been too much for you.”

“No, Madge, no,” says the young man, “it is not that. I am well in body now—quite convalescent, and almost quite strong ; but sick in soul, oh, Madge, so sick in soul !”

The girl, with a tender motherliness, strokes back the curling, clustering locks from his forehead, and softly caresses them. She speaks no word, but her manner is that of a mother soothing a sick and irritable child.

“I know what you think, Madge,” he continues, “though you are too good to say so. You think I am ungrateful to you and to God, who, together, have rescued me from the very jaws of death ; but you do not know what I have to bear, nor what I have been thinking of, lying here ; I’ll tell you what I have wished—wished a thousand times—that

you had let me die. What good is my life to me? What good is my life to others?"

The girl, with a quick, involuntary movement, stoops her head and kisses his burning forehead; it is the most innocent caress in the world—the same motherliness which would have prompted her to kiss away the cry of pain from a suffering child; but the instant after, some sudden consciousness suffuses her cheeks and forehead with hot colour, and she withdraws her caressing hand.

The young man does not seem to notice it. Absorbed in his own feelings, with that egotism which often is the accompaniment of severe mental pain, and which prompts us to pour out our sufferings into some sympathising ear, never heeding what pain we inflict, he continues, still more excitedly—

"It was cruel of you to let me live, Madge; you did not mean it, but it was cruel all the same. It was cruel of God. He has laid upon me more than I am able to bear."

"Hush, hush," interrupts Madge, softly; "you must not say that."

"I must," he says; "I must speak out what I think and feel. Has He not taken away everything from me? and more than

that, and worse than that, for He has shown me that I never possessed what I thought I had. He has mocked me with His gifts; given me tawdry, worthless glitter, where I thought I had pure gold. Yet one treasure I might have had, and that I played with, neglected, and lost; and when I had lost it, I found out what a treasure it was; when I had *lost* it, Madge—oh, that is a painful thought, it never leaves me night or day; and therefore I wish I had never been brought back to life. I have no one to live for—no one who cares for me to live.”

The girl might have said, “You have me!” The words are trembling on her lips, but she never utters them; the tears which rise to her eyes are pressed back and never fall. With one hand laid against her quivering heart, she waits patiently for another stab, and fortifies herself to bear it.

O Love! O true Love! giving all and asking nothing. O true Love! meeting oftentimes base ingratitude, or, at the best, incomprehension and indifference, comfort thyself! The time will come when thou shalt reign triumphant; till then, have patience and endure.

The expected stab does not come, however; perhaps feeling something of the pain

he is inflicting, the young man, with a change of voice and manner, says more quietly—

“What a fool I am to be wasting your time and mine, Madge, in such idle, useless complaints. I have so much to say to you, and the time is short. Get your knitting, dear Madge, and sit down close to me. I know you cannot bear to be doing nothing, and I want to ask your advice about something which has been weighing on my mind for days. I must find some work to do, Madge, for my money is all gone, and my health is restored. The time has arrived when we must make a change.”

The girl does as he requests. Her busy hands are indeed not accustomed to be idle, and her busy brain has been going through a similar process to his, and with the same result. In her quiet, uneventful life, his coming had made the first deep impression; with a painful sinking of heart, she thinks of the weary dullness his departure will leave her, and yet knows that the time has come when he must go.

“My brain is weak, and all sorts of fancies trouble me,” he says, “and yet I want to put my case in clear words before myself and before you. Let me see; it must be about six months ago that I first came here.”

“Seven months ago,” corrects Madge, “on the evening of Christmas Day. Mother was out, and I was sitting here alone, when I heard a ring at the bell, and, running up to the front door to answer it, I saw a young man standing on the threshold.”

“I was that young man,” says he.

“With a pale, frightened face,” continued Madge, “and wide-open, pitiful eyes, like the eyes of a blind man who would see, but cannot. I felt quite timid at the strangeness of his manner and appearance, and was going to tell him that mother was out, and that I thought he must have made a mistake in the house; when he pushed past me, and closing the front door, made right for the parlour, just as if he thought some pursuer were on his track. Alarmed, yet not knowing what to do, I followed him.”

“Yes, yes; I remember,” he interrupts, eagerly, “that was I.”

“I am not usually very cowardly, I think,” continues Madge; “but the strangeness of his manner, as he stood there looking at me, and speaking no word, and the consciousness of having no one near to help me in case of need, alarmed me somewhat, yet not much, for there was a look in his face which moved me to compassion. I felt sure he

meant me no harm ; and, summoning up my courage, I asked him what he wanted."

"And I answered, I wanted lodgings," he says, with animation, "it all comes back to me, it was really I!"

"We had put up a card in the window, mother and I," continues Madge, "but nobody had ever come who wanted to lodge with us, and I had almost forgotten it. I told him, therefore, that mother was not at home, and I could make no terms with him without her. Would he call again the next morning, and then, perhaps, he might come to an arrangement with mother. While I was speaking he pulled out a purse full of money, I could see that, and his pale face becoming paler every moment, begged me to let him remain. He was a stranger, he said, and feeling ill, and could go no further. As he spoke, I saw a change come over him, and while I was pondering what to do, for mother is strict, and I did not know whether she would be most angry at my sending away, perhaps a rich lodger, or at my letting a stranger remain alone with me in the house ; he gave a little low cry, and fell prostrate and insensible at my feet."

"Poor Madge, how I must have frightened you !"

“I was not so much frightened, I think,” she says, “as moved and touched; for the face, white as the snow upon the roofs opposite, was young, and yet had a dreadful, fearful something in it, not like youth. It seemed to me then, and it has seemed to me since, as if some terrible sight or impression had, in one fell moment, driven all the youthfulness away, and turned the face, with that dreadful look of fear upon it, to stone.”

Here the girl pauses and looks at her companion as if expecting some response or explanation, but he remains motionless, and with his eager eyes fixed upon her, waits for her to continue. With a shadow of disappointment clouding her face, she takes up her knitting again and resumes her narrative.

“I have always lived such a quiet life, and been so accustomed to rely on my own resources—for though we were poor enough after father died, mother considered herself more genteel than her surroundings, and never allowed me to associate much with the neighbours—that it did not occur to me to run out and call for help. I only knelt down by his side, moistened his lips with water, loosened his necktie, and then it was that I saw—”

“Saw what, Madge?”

The colour mounts to the girl's pale face,

and she hesitatingly looks at him; it is evident again that she expects some explanation or reply from him, but he only repeats his question with a little impatience—

“What was it you saw, Madge?”

Whatever it might have been, it seems impossible to her to mention it; the contending emotions which are agitating her, drive the warm blood, which a moment before had been brightening her pale cheeks, back with renewed violence to her palpitating heart. Rising hastily, with a feeling of suffocation, she opens the little window, and looks out into the quiet street. The day has been unusually sultry, and the morrow promises to be the same; scarcely a breath stirs the still air, and the small strip of sky, visible between the two rows of houses, is bright with rosy light. The sun is setting gloriously, and though Madge cannot see it, the beauty of the imagined spectacle soothes her troubled soul; the calm of the calm evening falls upon her fevered and excited imagination like dew upon a parched ground. Refreshed and strengthened, she turns back again to answer her companion's question. Better, far better, that the dread phantom, which perhaps she herself has conjured up, should be laid and laid at once. No time like the present, a



lost opportunity may never occur again. Even the sight of the young man, crouched in a corner of the sofa, does not daunt her; he has covered his face with his hands, and, cowered and trembling, seems like one expecting and trying to ward off a blow. Approaching him, she lays her hand, firm and yet gentle, upon his arm.

“Shall I go on, Robert?” she says, addressing him for the first time by the name which he had given them; he had always been “our lodger,” or “our patient” for herself and for others. “Shall I go on? It is your secret and not mine, and yet, if I may venture to advise, let the story which I am telling, be followed by the story which you have to tell me. Now speak, bid me be silent or continue.”

Letting his hands fall and lifting his head wearily, he looks steadily at her with his sad, hollow eyes. He is deadly pale, and in his face again is the shadow of that same horror which had so terrified her on their first meeting. That he had been passing through some severe mental conflict is evident to her, but she meets his look fearlessly, and her earnestness seems to inspire him with some sort of courage; he bows his head at last, as if in assent to her proposition, and Madge,

with a smile of encouragement, takes her place again at his side, and resuming the same quiet, unimpassioned tone in which she has spoken from the beginning, goes on, as if there had been no interruption.

“Then it was that I saw a red line round his throat ; a strange and fearful red line as if some one had been trying to strangle him. I do not think any one ever saw that mark but I, for I had bound a soft handkerchief round his throat, when the neighbour, whom I was obliged to summon at last, helped me to get him to bed. She wanted to send for the police, for she was sure, she said, that he must be a thief, or something of that sort ; but I would not let her. I told her I must wait for mother, and begged her in the meantime to fetch a doctor. I grew strangely independent all at once, and felt it was as impossible to let him go as perhaps another might have felt it impossible to let him stay ; and it was with a quiet calmness as to consequences which surprises me now, that I stood by his bedside, waiting for mother and waiting for the doctor.”

“God is good,” says the young man, “He directed my steps to you.”

“And you said He was cruel,” says the girl, with tender reproach ; “but what you

say now is what I felt in very truth—had felt, from the moment you fell upon the ground before me. God had sent you, for what purpose I did not know; but so firm was this impression that I felt brave enough to oppose myself, even to mother, if it were necessary, and that I had never done, never attempted, even in my babyhood. I had the full purse also to back me; full enough, that was evident, to satisfy our claims for many months to come. Oh, how long the time of waiting seemed! How weary the suspense! A terrible fear oppressed me, that the swoon had deepened into death; and in my loneliness and desolation, it seemed to my excited imagination as if not he alone, but all the world were dead, and I, desolate and forsaken, standing by the open grave, waiting for the resurrection.”

The girl speaks these last words in a voice low still, yet sharpened and tremulous with emotion. She has raised her head, and her soft, grey eyes, brightened and glowing from inward feeling, and her clasped hands, all illuminated by a last ray from the setting sun, make her so beautiful for the moment, that her companion is both amazed and awed. He softly touches her sleeve with his lips, but with none of the passion of youth, rather with

the reverence with which he might have kissed the garment of a saint.

As the sun fades, Madge picks up her fallen knitting, and addressing her companion more directly, continues—

“At last, after a time of waiting that seemed eternal, the doctor came. You had opened your eyes, however, and spoken, to my unutterable relief, before then, but your words were disconnected and broken, and however hard I tried to understand, I could find out no meaning in them; there was something about a grave and lying in it, and a great deal about a ring, which you had lost, or something of that sort. Your face flushed a deeper and deeper red; your breathing became short and painful; and as at last the doctor came, it was with an exclamation of relief, that I made way for him to come to your side. He pronounced your illness to be brain fever, and put an end to all my suspense and doubt concerning your stay, by declaring that you must remain for the present where you were, it would be murder to move you he said. Then, just giving some necessary directions for your treatment, and promising to send some medicine for you and come again the next day, the doctor departed. I believe as he went, he had almost forgotten

what I had told him about the strangeness of your presence in our house ; too hard-worked to feel more than a faint and passing interest in his patients, as the door closed upon him, he would no doubt never again have thought of your existence, but for the entry in his pocket book—‘No. 432, Brook Street, brain fever patient, such and such medicine.’”

“What a capital hand you are, Madge,” says the young man, “and how well you understand what I want. I do not know how necessary it may be for me in the future, to be able to put my story together, piece for piece. Some threads are wanting, it is true, but not many. Go on, dear Madge.”

“I have nearly finished,” she said, “and then it will be your turn. You know that mother yielded to my entreaties, and consented to let you stay. There was no probability of your being able to give an account of yourself for many weeks to come, and your pockets were empty, and your linen new and not marked. We could therefore communicate with no friends or relatives, even if you had any, and we were not the sort of people to set advertisements in the newspapers or to make any publicity of the thing. If you had died, I suppose it would have been done, but though you struggled with death, and fought

with death, many a day and weary night, yet your young constitution pulled you through, and you came back to consciousness and to life ; slowly though, and reluctantly, and the winter was over and spring with its soft, sunny days, had brightened and warmed even our dull street, before you were able to tell us who and what you were."

"And I told you," he interrupts, "that I had been shipwrecked and had lost all that I had, by one fell blow ; that the few who had loved me and whom I had loved, had gone down together, into the unfathomable abyss, into the blackness of darkness, never to be found again, never, never ; and that, though brought up a gentleman, and educated a gentleman, I was, with the exception of the full purse, saved with me, a complete beggar. This I told you, Madge ; and it was the truth, but not all !"

She looks at him with her grey eyes dilated and full of eager anxious enquiry. In a low, passionate voice, she murmurs—

"I knew it, I knew it, I have not dared to ask, but the mystery, the horrible mystery of the red line. Oh, explain it to me ! Trust me ! You may do it with safety ; and it oppresses me night and day. Often when I have sat beside you and listened to your in-

coherent mutterings, I have longed, and yet feared with deadly fear, to hear something that would give me a clue—”

She stops, appalled by the ashen horror in his face: the terrible stony look of fear and unutterable dread, which she had seen on their first meeting, was there again, ten times intensified. Raising his trembling hands, as if to adjure some foul and odious spectre, he thus addresses her, in a voice so broken and agitated, that she can scarcely understand him.

“Never, oh Madge, speak to me of that again; doing so, you give me back to the death from which you have rescued me. Oh, Madge, sister Madge, these are things so horrible, that any death would be preferable to going back, even in thought, to them again!”

His voice trembles and breaks into sobs and tears; the poor, broken down sick man, covering his face with his emaciated hands, weeps like a child.

Madge lets him weep. Are not her own eyes filled and brimming over with scalding tears of reproach for herself, and tender compassion for him? Angry at her own indiscretion and remorseful as she is, yet her womanly instinct tells her that his full heart will find relief in this utter abandon. It is

already quite dark, and she lights the little lamp, and lets down the blind, and busies herself in making preparations for the supper, which will be partaken of when mother comes home. She goes in and out of the room, arranging everything in her usual neat, methodical manner, though her heart is full almost to bursting ; but Madge is accustomed to control her feelings, and in the exercise of her household duties to find consolation. When all is ready and the storm of his passion has worn itself out, Madge goes timidly to him, longing, and yet afraid, to say something to comfort him. He is lying back on the sofa, in a state of almost utter exhaustion, but he holds out his hand to meet hers, and a wan smile flits over his pale face.

“I think I am better now,” he answers to her questioning look. “That fit of weeping, unmanly though it was, has lightened my heart. Something hard lying there seems to have melted away. I have done now with my old life for ever, and to-morrow I mean to begin a new one. Lay your hand upon my head, sister Madge, and say—‘God bless and prosper you in your new life, poor boy!’” You are so good and true that it will seem to me as if it were an angel comforting me.”

Something rises hard and choking in the



girl's throat, rendering it impossible for her to utter a word, but humouring him as she always does, she lays her hand gently upon his bowed head, and one hot tear falls upon it.

As if the touch of her hand and the sacred moisture from her true eyes had in them some electric power to heal and restore, the young man raises his face towards her with more of vigour and youthful hope in it than she has ever seen before. Taking her hand, he kisses it fervently; and in an almost cheerful tone, and yet with solemnity, says again—

“Now I have done with my old life for ever.”

For ever! Oh, what a strange phantasy of the human brain is that plan we make of our future! Truly God's ways are not our ways! “I have done with my old life for ever,” and yet fate was drawing him, inevitably and unavoidably, right back among those whom he had thought to lose for ever. Are not our lives chained to other lives by ties which no human will can break? Constantly and steadily, the Eternal Smith works at his anvil, forging fetters which we may stretch, but cannot sever. No human power, no human effort can alter the predetermined destiny. God in His mercy grant that His ways may be our ways also!

Suddenly Madge raises her head and listens anxiously ; her quick ear has recognised one sound among the many sounds outside. The neighbours are coming home from chapel, and one step, not like a man's, and yet unlike any other woman's Madge knows, is, to her, distinctly audible. "It is mother," says the girl, with a sudden change of manner. All trace of emotion vanishes from her face, which settles into a steady and cold gravity. Hark ! another footstep, short and tripping ! The expression of her face changes once more into contempt and aversion. "It is mother," she says again mechanically, "Mother and—he."

A loud, determined rap at the door, and Madge leaves the room to answer it. The sick young man, in the meantime, letting his feet fall from the sofa, seizes the only book he can find—the Bible—and, bolt upright, is deeply engaged in its perusal, when the mistress of the house, Madge's mother, enters ; to the girl's great relief, unaccompanied by her companion, whom she has taken leave of at the door.

## CHAPTER IV.

## MOTHER.

THE sun, that great artificer, had been busy all day in bringing the panting city to a white heat, and was now putting out its fiery furnaces till the morrow, and fading to its daily death, when the door of a small Dissenting chapel in the north-east of London, opening widely, disclosed to view a motley multitude, pouring out in much confusion, and doing full justice to the sun's workmanship, inasmuch as those who had not attained the last white stage, were direct on the road for it, and red-hot.

The minister, who had been preaching frantically, according to his wont, had had comparatively easy work that evening in melting the hearts of his auditors, the sun aiding and abetting him so effectually that pocket-handkerchiefs—usually much in use on such stirring occasions, and always welcomed by the leader of the devotions, as an indisputable proof of his eloquence and dead set down to his opponents—were flourished to such unwonted extent, that the preacher, if

possessed of a lively imagination, might have regarded them as the red and white banners of his order, and rejoiced in the unanimity of his partisans.

But the most stirring sermon, and the noblest eloquence, must eventually come to an end, however prolonged, and the Reverend Jeremiah Turnbull had shed his last drop of perspiration on the head of the devoted deacon below, had administered the benediction, and dismissed his melting auditors. Only one woman remained behind, standing on the steps of the chapel, apparently waiting for some one. One or two of her fellow worshippers, passing her, had greeted her with a "Good evening, Mrs. Thomson." "How's Miss Margaret?" "What a pity she's missed this blessed occasion," to which remarks or inquiries she gave no other answer than a hard "good night."

She was a tall, upright woman, about fifty or thereabouts; better dressed than most of the other worshippers in the chapel, who were principally of the lower working class, and whose only mark of gentility appeared to consist in the enormous size of those red and white banners before mentioned. Her eyes and hair were jet black, the latter as yet unmixed with grey, and the sharply defined, and

exceedingly high, colour on her cheeks seemed hardly attributable to the heat of the evening, for so hard and cold was her expression, that even the warmest, looking at her, experienced a sensation as of a keen east wind. Perhaps the only one in the chapel who had remained unmoved under both melting influences brought to bear there, she stood now, facing the setting sun, as if no ray of it could warm her, no heat melt. Under her arm she held a huge umbrella; taken with her according to her inflexible principle, that the brighter the sun shone, and the hotter, the more probability of rain. Almost any one else, standing as she was standing, waiting as she was waiting, would have allowed this umbrella, which was heavy and bulky, to rest a little upon the ground; but she had no such notion. "Life is hard," was her theory, "let us make it harder. Our burden is heavy, let us make it heavier. This draught is bitter, let us make it bitterer."

She had stood thus, perhaps some ten minutes, when the minister himself, accompanied by a limping pew opener who had been assisting him to change his gown and was now waiting to lock up for the night, coming out, laid a heavy hand upon her arm.

"Ah, there you are at last," she said,

rather ungraciously, "a long time you've been and kep' me standing here, and I havn't got any time to spare, for Madge and supper will both be ready and waitin' for me."

"Now, don't put yourself out, Mrs. Thomson," said the minister, conciliatingly, "and we'll go along together. You've no objection, have you, to my going along with you? and then we can talk over things comfortable, which was what you wanted."

The Reverend Jeremiah Turnbull, always recognisable by the white badge of his order (a rather dirty and soiled badge, sometimes, it is true) was a thickset, greasy man, with long body and exceedingly short legs; so short and insignificant compared with the upper part of his frame, that any one interested in him might have lived under constant apprehension that he must and would, in course of time, become top-heavy and topple over. Indeed this fear was not wholly groundless, for on certain lugubrious convivial occasions, when the revd. gentleman was being entertained by any one, or number, of the faithful, and was entertaining them in return by stirring and lively accounts of the agonies which were preparing for their non-chapel going neighbours in hell, his face and head would swell to such enormous extent

that one or two female members of his flock who, for a particular reason, frequently had their eye on him, were often panic stricken with fear, lest the threatened catastrophe might occur too prematurely for their hopes. For the Revd. Jeremiah was still a bachelor; not for want of any one to woo, but because of a secret fear he entertained, that any movement in that direction would be fatal to his popularity, by decreasing the number of his female members, who made up the far greater portion of the attenders of his chapel. So, for the present, he remained single, bestowing the favour of his presence impartially on each in turn, and drinking a friendly cup of tea, flavoured if they chose with something stronger, at the house of each aspiring spinster, in unbiassed succession.

For a few succeeding minutes, the two, so unequally matched, went on together in silence, the woman striding rapidly forward, shouldering her umbrella as a soldier shoulders his bayonet, and followed with difficulty by her panting and exhausted companion, who strove in vain to keep up with her.

“Not so fast, Mrs. Thomson,” he gasped at last, “at the rate you are going at, there’s no chance for our having that bit of talk you were anxious for. You told me you wanted

to ask my advice about something, but with my breath going like this, I shall soon have no breath left to answer you."

The woman, addressed as Mrs. Thomson, turned round so abruptly that the point of her formidable umbrella hit the Revd. Jeremiah smartly on the nose, making him wince and sneeze. With a cry of pain, he stopped short in his headlong career, to examine it with much anxiety, and having at last reassured himself as to its having sustained no serious injury, beyond a very considerable increase of colour, he continued, with pardonable irritation—

"I think I'd better go home, for you don't seem to have anything to say to me, and I'm wasting my time, and wearing myself out for nothing."

"I was just going to begin," said the lady, "when you pulled me up so short."

"If you can talk at that rate of walking," said the injured and still angry minister, "I can't, and what's more, I won't; and I think I'd better go home at once and have my nose looked to."

"'Tis only a word I want from you," said his unmoved and unsympathising companion, "about that young man in our house; only yes or no."



“I should think it was too late to begin asking my advice about him,” said the Revd. Jeremiah, shortly, still occupied in gently moving his nose backwards and forwards to ascertain if any injury had been done to the bone. “You didn’t ask my advice about taking him in.”

“No, I didn’t,” rejoined the strong-minded woman, with such an emphatic jerk of her umbrella that the revd. gentleman retreated a step in undisguised alarm. “No, I didn’t, and I ain’t going to say but what I’m sorry I took him in; but it never was my way to fret over spilt milk. And now I want to get rid of him, and want you, my spiritual adviser, to tell me how to do it, in a Christian and becoming manner.”

If there was some latent contempt in these words, it fell all unheeded on the dulled ears of him to whom they were addressed. Brightening up considerably at the flattering idea of his spiritual importance, and almost forgetting his tingling nose, the Revd. Jeremiah, in a solemn and ponderous manner, began, with much solemnity—

“Tell the young man in question (an unbeliever, I fear, seeing he has never inquired for spiritual counsel, has never wished to consult with me about his precious soul,

doomed, I sadly anticipate, to everlasting destruction), tell him that, as a Christian member of a Christian flock, you dare not harbour him any longer under your roof, and that he must accommodate himself with another lodging as speedily as possible."

"That's all well enough," said the woman, "but there's something else that worries me; he've got no money."

"All the more reason," put in the man of God, "for getting quit of him as soon as possible."

"Up to now," continued the lady, "he've paid me handsome, not exorbitant, but handsome. When he came to himself after his long illness, I took him my bill, and he gave me his purse to pay it. I had been obliged to take money out of it before then, to pay the doctor and the medicine, but that was all written down exact and orderly. No judge nor jury could find fault with me, or say I had taken a penny from him but what was just and right."

"No one who knows you will doubt that," said the minister.

"Now, I'm a hard woman, but a Christian woman, too, I hope, and one as never misses prayer-meeting or chapel. He've paid me handsome; shall I turn him out at last?"

“‘But what is thy servant, a dog, that he should do this thing?’” quoted the Revd. Jeremiah, piously.

“Since he has been able to manage his own affairs,” she continued, “he’ve paid me a certain sum every week—not too much, not too little—for his board and lodging. Last week he told me that his purse was nearly empty.”

“That’s a bad job, a very bad job, indeed,” muttered the minister.

“And yet I cannot keep him for nothing, nor wouldn’t if I could. Go, he must! The question is, how can I get rid of him with decency?”

“Tell him to seek some employment; to work as an honest man should,” suggested the Revd. Jeremiah.

“He’s a stranger in London, without character and without friends.”

“A dangerous subject to have in your house; dangerous for you, doubly dangerous for your daughter.”

“Ah, Madge!” said the mother, “Madge is the real obstacle, after all; she won’t let him go without a struggle, you may depend; and for all she’s so quiet-like and submissive, the only person in the world I’m half afraid of is Madge.”

“ And yet she has always been an obedient daughter.”

“ I ain’t going to deny that. She never was what you may call naughty, even when she was almost a baby ; yet she worried me so, even then, that there have been times when I have almost hated her. When I lost my husband and my boy that I loved (for the first time the woman’s voice softened, and something like a tear dimmed her bold, black eye), and for whom I would have worked my fingers to the bone and never murmured ; and when I was left all alone with her, and hard put-to sometimes to make a living for us both out of my dressmaking, she’d sit looking up at me with her great grey eyes, so reproachful-like, as it seemed to me, that I often slapped her out of pure anger to see her look like that.”

Her companion made a motion, as if about to speak, but she checked him with her hand.

“ Don’t go to tell me as it was wrong ; I know it was ; I hated myself for it, but I didn’t love her, not one bit the better, for even then she never cried out loud like any other child, but sat quiet in her little corner and shed tears, great tears, that seemed to burn me up, and yet were powerless to touch my heart with pity, or with love for her.”

Again he would have spoken, but, with the same imperative movement, she checked him as before.

“No, let me have my say out! As she grew bigger, and didn’t grow straight like me, do you think I loved her any better than before? And though she got to be useful to me with my sewing, so that together we earn a very decent living, though I say it as shouldn’t; yet, I suppose, all the love I had in me died out with my husband and my bonny boy; for though I’ve got used to her, and should get on badly enough without her, I dare say, yet I don’t believe if she were to die to-morrow, I could bring a decent tear into my eye.”

The Revd. Jeremiah had an idea that this was a bad state of things, but he was wisely accustomed, in giving spiritual advice to the more influential of his flock, to accommodate his answer to their wishes; so, not clearly seeing his way here, he only shook his heavy head, and gave expression to his sympathy in a prodigious sigh.

“So you see,” continued Mrs. Thomson, “that being in a dilemma, I come to my minister, as being the one who ought to know best what is the right and Christian course to pursue; and, I take it, he will be able to

give me a reason that will satisfy Madge as well as myself."

"Don't you think," said the revd. gentleman at last, with much inward satisfaction at the fact of the cleverest woman in his congregation having come to him for advice and counsel, "don't you think that we have been forgetting the principal danger in this question, and one which it behoves us to make our chief concern? You have spoken of your daughter, and of your want of love for her. Your duty to her, however, remains the same; and how can you reconcile it with your duty to allow a young man without character, without friends, worst of all, without religion, to remain alone with her for hours, nay, days, together? As long as he was ill, that was a different thing, but now—the matter lies in a nutshell, my dear madam. There can be no doubt whatever as to the propriety, nay, the absolute necessity, of the step you are proposing to take."

With bland self-sufficiency the minister ceased, well satisfied with himself. Had he not hit the nail now exactly on the head? No matter how impure and worldly was the motive, if the garb was spiritual and sanctified. The world is easily deceived, and cares little to seek below the surface.

“I never thought of that,” said the mother, with a laugh. “Madge is so different to other girls; and yet, now you have put it into my head, I don’t know but what you may be right; anyhow, it may do for my purpose; if not with her, at least with him. So now come in and take a bit of supper with us; you shall be heartily welcome.”

But the Revd. Jeremiah, feeling that he had already sufficiently distinguished himself for that evening, and hearing Margaret of whom he felt some awe and whose clear eyes he rather dreaded to meet, declined her invitation, and went home, carrying his head a trifle higher than usual, along the now solitary street.

After supper, when the young lodger, pleading weariness, had retired for the night, and the mother and daughter were left alone together, the former began in her hard, cold voice—

“I came home with the minister this evening, Madge.”

“I heard him with you at the gate, mother.”

Then a little pause, during which both bent over their sewing, and the busy needles clicked, as if challenging one another.

At last the elder lady, folding her work together, said—

"It's time to go to bed, and I want to settle a certain matter with you before you go."

A sharp pang at her heart, and a keen foreboding of what was coming, made Madge's cheek pale; but she raised her clear eyes to her mother's without flinching.

"I want you to tell Mr. Brandis to-morrow (I am going out sewing, and you can do it better than I) that he must look out for another lodging, and that I give him a week's notice."

Madge's cheek grew paler, and she laid one hand upon her palpitating heart.

"The minister thinks that his being here so much alone with you will set folks talking, and injure your reputation; and I think so, too."

"That was not necessary, mother, for you, or for the minister," said the girl proudly. "For only this very evening we have been talking about it, and he is going."

"And if he *is* going, miss," said the lady, sharply, "no need for you to tell me what I ought to do, or the minister either. If you've settled it between yourselves that he is to go, so much the better; you're mighty confidential, you two, and I'll warrant you're up to no good between you. But," she continued,



warming in her anger, and irritated beyond expression by the look in her daughter's eyes, "don't you think you are going to catch him. He's a beggar, 'tis true, but he's a gentleman, and you are—significantly touching her own shapely shoulders—what you are. I'm your mother, though one wouldn't think it, to see you looking at me like that, and I don't want you to make a fool of yourself."

"Oh, mother, mother," sobbed the poor girl, "what have I ever done to make you so cruel to me?" And taking her candle, she went up to her own little room, at the top of the house, and, sitting down upon her bed, let her poor tortured heart find relief in bitter tears.

Such scenes as these were not uncommon between the two, so strangely unlike in character and disposition. In former years, the girl's affectionate heart, yearning for love, had cherished some faint hope of winning the heart of her hard mother; but her grey, eloquent eyes often spoke when she was silent under hard injustice; and so, in course of time, the mother had come to regard the girl almost as her enemy.

Perhaps some particle of truth in the words that had wounded her so painfully, had given them their poisoning sting. It was long, very

long, ere Madge could compose herself or think of sleep.

The midnight hour had long sounded before she got up from her crouching position, and began to make preparations for the night.

With trembling fingers she loosened her brown hair, which fell down over her poor back and shoulders in one thick, heavy mass. Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, she set the candle down upon her tiny dressing-table, where the light fell full upon her face, reflecting it in the glass, and viewed herself long and steadily.

Pale though she was, and her eyes swollen and heavy with weeping, yet a painter might have thought her well worthy of painting at that moment. The heavy masses of the dusky hair shaded her thin cheek, and covered up all deficiencies of her form, while her soft eyes, dimmed with tears, still shone with a tender light of their own, like Truth behind a veil, and the sorrowful lines which, not distorting, only sweetened the expression of the gentle mouth, gave her the appearance and the sorrowful dignity of a suffering saint.

“Poor fool!” she said to herself reproachfully, yet without bitterness, “who am I, that

I should hope for happiness!—and yet he called me his sister; God grant that I may be a real sister to him!” Then she crept, trembling and shivering, to bed.

Turn thy face to the wall, Madge, and dream of Heaven! for there goodness turns the balance, and purity of soul is saintly beauty! Turn thy face to the wall, Madge, and dream of Heaven! for surely there the longing heart will be filled with love unutterable, and we have His sacred word that even “the desert shall rejoice and shall blossom as the rose.”

## CHAPTER V.

## A NEW CLERK.

MR. GREWGIOUS, in his solitary chambers in Staple Inn, sipping a cup of coffee after a late dinner, and sipping it in no very enviable frame of mind, has had a trying day. He is feeling deeply that he is getting too old for change, and yet change has been forced upon him—come down upon him, as he says to himself, disconsolately, like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky.

For, however unpleasant it may be, in some points of view, to have a clerk who, intellectually, is immeasurably your superior, and who never hesitates to force the conviction of this fact down your reluctant throat—a bitter tonic for your humility; however inconvenient it may be to have a clerk, so liable to wander into the mazes of fancy and lose himself there, as to be never up to the point of poking his own fire, and therefore virtually compelling you to perform that office for him; however harrowing to the feelings it may be, to have a clerk so sunk in melancholy and clogged by the weight of a tragedy which

no one will relieve him of, that it is a matter of hard work to hoist him to the surface of everyday life, when he is wanted there; yet all these evils, like all other evils to which mankind is subject, become comparatively easy to bear, from usage, and an angular man, who has shaped himself to a particular angle, and bent his patient back to accommodate itself to a particular load, finds it difficult, without dislocation, to renew the operation. So, Mr. Grewgious, pondering over these things all alone, and almost forgetting his coffee in his cogitations, may perhaps be excused for imagining, and even finding some relief in the imagination, that P. J. T. under the same distressing circumstances, would have been Probably Jaundiced Too.

Not that Mr. Grewgious has had a want of applicants for the post vacated by Bazzard; no, indeed! that would have been a very blessing, compared to the dread reality. Ever since he had been so unfortunate as to make his want known in the "Times," crowds of applicants for the vacant place have been invading the quiet of Staple Inn, and making it as noisy as the noisy streets outside, with the echo of their footsteps. The frightened sparrows, scared from their search for crumbs below, fly dismayed to sheltering roof and

chimney, looking down with ruffled feathers, cocked heads, and bright attentive eyes, upon the unwonted scene ; and the husky door-bell of Mr. Grewgious' chambers, breaking down under this unprecedented demand upon its strength, grows dumb and voiceless. Poor Mr. Grewgious himself—clerkless, and only assisted by a temporary boy who is usually absent, occupied in a vain attempt to bring down a sparrow, when the force of the invaders is ' numerically strongest—is quite knocked off his legs by the constant running to and fro, and what is worse, knocked off his balance too.

Aged clerks have presented themselves, with snowy heads and scanty locks, and faces, more pinched, perhaps, from want, than from old Time himself ; and youthful clerks, with rosy health upon their beardless cheeks. Mysterious clerks, with untold horrors in their hollow eyes ; and ingenuous clerks, with gaudy flowers in their button-holes ; dismal clerks, with long-drawn whining voices and heart-rending sighs ; and cheerful clerks, one broad grin from ear to ear ; come-down-in-the-world clerks, with a sort of faded and shabby gentility about them still ; and coming-up-in-the-world clerks, with a smack of the errand-boy upon them yet ; fast

clerks, in at the door and out again, before one could cry "Jack Robinson;" and slow clerks, impossible to be got rid of when once there. Distracting clerks, one and all, to worried Mr. Grewgious who is most thankful to get rid of each in turn, and who, in a worse dilemma than at the first, has finally placed the temporary boy behind the outer door with strict injunctions to let no one in, and has retired, worn-out and disconsolate, to his innermost sanctuary, to brood over the vicissitudes of human life, and to rest a little from the toils and labours of that terrible day.

Is that a rap? Is it, in the name of humanity, a rap on the door of his sanctimonium? Now heaven be merciful to the ears of that temporary boy, for Mr. Grewgious, who has never administered a box on the ear in his life, has vowed to make his first experiment in that way on them, and to make it with a vengeance.

Utterly incapable of rising to the emergency and doubly bolting and barricading the door to keep out the intruder, Mr. Grewgious utters his customary "come in," and succumbs to his feelings in an easy chair, into which he sinks, a prey to despair, as a tall figure shows itself upon the threshold.

“Bless my soul!” he murmurs, “if it ain’t *another!*”

Another comes in with a low bow.

“Their name is Legion,” groans Mr. Grewgious, adding aloud with the resignation of utter despair. “Take a seat, sir.”

The new comer seating himself, and still remaining silent, Mr. Grewgious continues—

“You are come, I presume, in answer to the advertisement?”

A low bow again.

“This is new,” thinks Mr. Grewgious, “this is original! They were of every sort and variety; but, one thing they had in common. They were all gifted, as that unfortunate boy would say—” Mr. Grewgious, here, is sensible of a feeling of pity for that culprit, on account of the facial suffering in store for him, but is still firm in his intention of inflicting it, as a matter of principle—“with the gift of the gab.”

An old young man, or a young old one?—Mr. Grewgious’ short-sighted eyes cannot make out which. A man of about middle height; thin and scared looking; with black beard and whiskers; and hair dark as night. A pale man, with something weird and mysterious about him like a spectre, and whose eyes, hidden behind a massive pair of



blue spectacles, are all the more open to terrible suspicion on that account. A voiceless man, sitting still in the chair, into which he had sunk on Mr. Grewgious' invitation, and in which he remains motionless, with his glazed eyes fixed upon that exhausted gentleman, freezing the very marrow in his bones.

"This is getting alarming," thinks Mr. Grewgious, "and I'm on the wrong side for the bell. Besides, that boy is sure not to be at his post. But boys will be boys," he adds, as his anger ebbs fast, "I was a boy once myself, and remember perfectly how it hurt me to have my ears boxed, and how they burned afterwards. I'll lay it on gently, only as a matter of warning." Then aloud, "Do you wish to confer with me on any subject, sir?"

The being in the chair trembles visibly, moistens his dry lips, clears his throat, begins to speak, and breaks down at the first word, moistens his lips again, and at last in a voice which struggles to be steady but which jolts up and down like a cart over a rutty road, says—

"You are seeking a clerk?"

"Unfortunately," says Mr. Grewgious, "I am." He is greatly relieved to hear the mysterious stranger speak; for, exhausted

as he is, his imagination has been conjuring up in him a ghostly visitor, perhaps P. J. T. himself.

“ I am come to offer myself as a candidate for the place.”

“ Very good ! ” responds Mr. Grewgious, wishing that he hadn’t.

“ I beg you to try me.”

There is a curious roughness in the voice as if the speaker were struggling with tears, and as if the issue of the struggle were very doubtful. But after a pause, he goes on again—

“ I am poor, and without friends. I am exceedingly anxious to get work to do because, if I cannot, I must beg or starve, and to beg I am ashamed. But I will work—work night and day, if you wish it; and you shall pay me for that work not one penny more than you decide that it is worth.”

Although quite staggered by this address, so unusual, so wholly different from anything said by the fifty-odd applicants who have been besieging his rooms and utterly altering the chronic aspect of Staple Inn all that day, and touched by the pathos and apparent sincerity of the speaker, and by something else—a something undefinable, but which makes the strange figure, and the broken voice

seem not altogether unfamiliar—though why familiar, or where, he cannot tell—Mr. Grewgious is, nevertheless, far too versed in the ways of the world and its hypocrisies, to show for the present anything more than his strict business side to the stranger. He inquires, therefore, more drily than ever—

“What is your name, sir?”

“Brandis. Robert Brandis, at your service.”

“Are you young,” continues Mr. Grewgious, screwing up his eyes in an earnest endeavour to penetrate the blue spectacles, and unscrewing them again, as wise as he was before, “or middle-aged, or old?”

“I am young, sir; young in years, though trouble has aged me.”

“Humph!” exclaims Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head in some perturbation of spirit; for good sense and good feeling are pointing in opposite directions, and he cannot make up his mind which to follow. Then, abruptly—“Have you anything the matter with your eyes? I wear spectacles myself, sometimes, on account of my short sight; but not blue ones. I cannot say,” viewing these articles with strong disfavour, and speaking more sharply than he would have done but for the conflict within, “that I consider them an improvement. Not at all.”

“I wear them, sir, because I must. They do not interfere with my seeing all it is necessary for me to see.”

“Very likely,” thinks Mr. Grewgious, “but they interfere with your being seen, and that’s what I want to do.”

“Can you write a good, clear, legible hand?” inquires Mr. Grewgious further, in a hard and severe tone. For common good sense is slowly yielding to the attack of uncommon kindly feeling, and Mr. Grewgious is half-angry with himself for his own weakness, as he knows the world will call it.

“Let me show you, sir.” He turns to a table, upon which writing materials are lying, and writes his name in full. There is no manner of objection to be made to the handwriting, even on the part of the world. It will do.

“Have you any notion of bookkeeping?”

“Not much, sir, as yet; but I will learn, in my spare hours, if I have any. In a very short time, I will learn. I am a good arithmetician. Do not let that be an obstacle.”

“That shall be no obstacle,” says Mr. Grewgious, feeling strangely drawn towards, and at the same time strangely repulsed from, this individual with the blue spectacles, “just as if,” he says to himself, “I were a

hard old bit of iron, which I very likely am, and he, a magnet, continually changing sides."

"So far, all being satisfactory," continues Mr. Grewgious, who has been smoothing his head to bring that too, if possible, to a satisfactory degree of smoothness, though apparently without the wished-for result, for he still looks perplexed and dissatisfied, "there only remains the business form of consulting your testimonials. May I trouble you for them?"

The result of this very natural question is a startling one. The stranger springs to his feet; and approaches Mr. Grewgious with a passionate gesture.

"Have I not told you," he says, "that I have none. Have I not said that I am a stranger in the city—in the country itself, and that I have no acquaintance or friend to speak a word in my favour. Painful family affairs, which have tainted me although I am innocent, have forced me to begin life again, and to begin it at the foot of the ladder. You are a good and kindhearted man, sir. I feel it. I have heard others say so. Do not send me away again on that account, as others have done over and over again. For, sir, the devil is always close at hand to tempt desperate men, and there is such a thing as

desperation, there is such a condition as despair."

The repulsive power of the magnet is strongly brought to bear upon Mr. Grewgious during this speech, and makes him turn a cold ear to the passionate appeal. For he can read no confirmation of its truth in the eyes of the speaker. Their cold, glassy covering baffles all his efforts to penetrate them, and he draws back stiffly, to say, drily and coldly—

"That is all very well, though hardly a business way of going to work, and may be true, *may* be. I have no right to doubt it, but I am a remarkably unimaginative man, and I find it difficult to bring any imagination to bear upon such a case. It is, however, excuse me, so unusual for a young man to have attained your age, and attained it blamelessly, without being able to produce one individual, personally or by letter, to testify to that fact, that, as a well-wisher, I should advise you to lose no time in endeavouring to hunt up some one to perform that friendly office for you. I should indeed, should indeed.'

"That is impossible," answers the stranger, burying his agitated face in his trembling hands, and the tone of his voice strikes cold.

on the warm heart of the old man, for it is a tone of anguish. Then, after a pause, he raises his head again, to make one last effort.

“Oh, sir, can you not feel that I am honest? Can you not hear that I am only longing to obtain work; and willing and wishful to perform that work to the best of my ability? Is there no possibility of my getting anything to do without testimonials? Is it utterly hopeless to think of obtaining work without a character?”

“As a man of business,” answers Mr. Grewgious, clearing his voice, which is getting husky, and smoothing his smooth head again, “I should say no. As a man acquainted with the ways of the world, and its customs, and its requirements, as a rule, I should say decidedly no!”

“Then may God save me, and protect me from evil,” says the young man, taking his hat, “and help me, if it be possible, to find some one who thinks differently. I *have* heard, casually heard, you spoken of as a kind-hearted, benevolent man, and that gave me courage to come to you. Otherwise, I would never have crossed your threshold; otherwise, I would have gone to the world’s end, rather than have risked what I *have* risked in coming here to-night. Not that I

blame you ; you are acting, no doubt, according to your lights. God help me now, for there is no help with man ! ”

Uttering these last words under his breath, more to himself than to his hearer, he turns hurriedly to go—would have been gone in another moment, but that Mr. Grewgious, in whose benevolent heart his last words seem to ring like a knell, crossing the room with an agility utterly unexpected in him, lays a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

“ Wait a bit ; wait a bit ! ” he pants, out of breath, “ and sit down again. We haven’t done with one another yet. Who told you I didn’t mean to try you ? Not I, I am sure. Why, you are like a Jack-in-the-box (I had one given me once, when I was a little lad, and it was the terror of my childhood) springing out like mad, when one never means or expects him. We business men are not accustomed to making contracts in a hurry ; and I, in particular, am so remarkably slow in my decisions, so snail-like, if I may be permitted to compare myself to any one of God’s creatures without giving offence, that without sufficient time I can decide on nothing. Bless my soul ! I’m all of a tremble still with the effort of stopping you. Give me time, my good fellow, give me time.”



With his blue spectacles all awry, and his hat falling from his trembling hand ; with his lips quivering, and the tears he had kept back with such difficulty during the interview, falling thick and fast, the young man sinks into the chair again, opposite Mr. Grewgious who is blowing his nose with a trumpet-sound. Sorrow may be dry-eyed, but sudden and unexpected relief from sorrow is never.

“I was just upon the point of saying,” begins Mr. Grewgious, speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if he fears his voice may turn traitor, and let out something he wishes to conceal, “that I didn’t object to give you a trial, contrary to custom, even without a character, when you broke into what may be termed the Emotional. Being myself a man born without emotions or, at any rate, with emotions in so rarified a state that they never expose me to the risk of an explosion, it is naturally mortifying and trying to my feelings to see people meandering into entirely unbusiness-like paths where I cannot follow ’em. You took a by-path, sir, in entering into the Emotional, and I beg you to return to me now into the broad highroad of Common Sense.”

How hard and dry are the words the

old man utters; and his voice, hard and dry, too, chimes full in unison. Yet his eyes, screwed together so tightly, are not screwed this time only to enable his short sight to reach further. And when he again attacks his nose, and brings forth a renewal of the trumpet-sound, he turns aside his head to make use of his handkerchief for another and more secret purpose.

“Your duties would not be heavy,” he resumes, “and though naturally hard (I was born so) I trust you would not find me an unjust master. Your salary, I will pay you monthly for the present (it is more convenient to me), a month in advance. If you are unprovided with lodgings, there are some nice ones not far from here which are to be had. The lady who keeps them—a most remarkable female of the name of Billickin—has begged me to remember that they are empty, and to help her to fill them. But that, of course, rests with you,” continues Mr. Grewgious, remembering, with some alarm, that a sojourn with that lady is not without its drawbacks. “Though she might take more kindly to a male than to a female,” he thinks.

The stranger, who can hardly speak for tears, thanks him fervently.

“It is a pleasant custom (among heathens) in ratifying a contract,” says Mr. Grewgious, “to break bread over it. My coffee is cold, but my recreant boy, whom I hear whistling outside”—(a shadow crosses the old man’s brow, as he remembers the iniquity of that delinquent, and deepens, as he remembers what must be his punishment. “But,” he reflects, brightening, “to inflict it to-day, in presence of a stranger, would be a cruel and unwarrantable aggravation. I’ll—I’ll put it off till to-morrow”)—

“My boy,” he continues, the brightness brightening, and illuminating his unfinished features with a sort of glow, “shall run over to Furnival’s for a fresh supply. Not that we are heathens, I trust; or that coffee is bread, or anything like it (though we may have a morsel to eat along with it, for I’m as hungry, myself, as a wolf) but I’m the most unfortunate man in the world at a simile, and invariably break down when I attempt one; and it may answer the same purpose, perhaps.”

Mr. Grewgious, during these remarks, has been guilty of the rudeness of turning his back upon the stranger, and has been studiously contemplating indifferent objects in the room with a sudden interest in them which demands all the short sight with which Nature

has provided him. For the young man has broken into low sobs, and is vainly struggling to compose himself; and, hidden somewhere in that ungainly figure and behind those unfinished features, is a sensitiveness for the feelings of others, and a delicacy which might be vainly sought for in some highly susceptible and nervous females who, taking credit for much more, endeavour to prove it by shrieking at the sight of a toad, swooning at the sight of blood, and going into hysterics at the faintest sign of contradiction.

To give the stranger still further time and opportunity to subdue his emotion, Mr. Grewgious now shuffles out of the room; a spectacle for a moustachiod buck to sneer and show his white teeth at; but at which God, perhaps, deigns to look down with a certain approbation.

On his return the young man has (to use Mr. Grewgious' own words) emerged from the by-paths of the Emotional, and come out into the broad, high road of Common Sense.

In with Mr. Grewgious, or rather, close upon the heels of that gentleman, comes a waiter from Furnivals' with the smoking coffee, and the "bit of eatable," which promptitude on the part of said waiter is so approved of by Mr. Grewgious that he rewards it on the spot with a piece of silver.

“Really,” he remarks, rubbing his hands complacently, “this will be quite a cheerful family tea, to which I’ve long been a stranger; — only that it aint tea, and we aint a family— but that’s like me. Draw up to the table, my good sir, and let’s begin, for I’m absolutely starving. My dinner must have gone all the wrong way, on account of the worry I’ve been in, for I’m sure I don’t know what’s become of it. Dear me! it’s just occurred to me that perhaps you don’t like coffee.”

“Oh, yes, I do, sir.”

“Well, that’s a blessing! Now let me try and pour out for you, and if I don’t make it to your liking, pray mention it, and I shall be extremely obliged to you. I’m such a remarkably helpless man, and so little used to pouring out anything for anybody except myself—and I’m nobody—that I’m almost sure to bungle. Here’s cream, here’s sugar, here’s (holding it close, to make out what) something I can’t specify, but it’s something to eat, and very nice, I dare say. Now, do try it. I shall feel personally flattered if you like it.”

Handing all these things to his guest, and pressing them upon him, as if he had got the notion into his head that he were actually on the point of perishing from starvation, Mr. Grewgious, in spite of his protestations of

hunger, touches not a morsel, nor imbibes a drop, until he has seen his visitor fully occupied.

“There’s nothing,” pursues Mr. Grewgious, meditatively, as he enjoys his coffee, “there’s nothing goes against the grain with me so hard as to see people not eating what I’ve set before ’em. Naturally rather a patient man, I become impatient on such occasions, for their behaviour touches me on a tender point—on the culinary superiority of Furnival’s. Now, I’ve dined at Furnival’s for twenty years or more, and I’d stake Furnival’s against the best hotel in London. Some might call that prejudice, because I’m so little acquainted with other hotels. I am, no doubt, a remarkably prejudiced man, and don’t wish to deny it; but Furnival’s is my pet prejudice, and I’d enter the lists for Furnival’s at any time or moment, and stick there like a leech.”

Glancing from under his bushy eyebrows to see if his visitor is sufficiently impressed with his words to do full justice to Furnival’s, Mr. Grewgious makes a great pretence of pouring himself out another cup of coffee and replenishing his plate, really doing it for the stranger.

“And now,” says Mr. Grewgious, “to re-

turn to the subject of your qualifications. There's one question I must ask you and which I almost forgot, though it's a most important one—can you poke a fire ? ”

Smiling for the first time during the interview, the young man answers with some surprise at the singularity of the question—

“ I hope so, sir. Are you very particular about the manner of doing it ? ”

“ No, it isn't that. Every human individual, I do believe, has his own particular way of poking a fire ; I've got my way, and I dare say you have yours. But I mean, whether you are liable to forget to do it ? ”

“ If I should be so foolish, sir, I should have to suffer the penalty ; but I do not think my memory is so short.”

“ Why, you see,” says Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head somewhat dejectedly, “ I had a clerk—alas ! I have him no more !—who, being a genius, and a writer of tragedies, couldn't be expected, you know (and I didn't expect it, I am sure) to think of such a subordinate thing as a fire, and, every day a'most, his fire used to go out.”

“ He couldn't have been so liable to take cold as I, then, or he would have remembered to replenish it for his own sake.”

“ Not liable to take cold ! Bless you ! he

was liable to take it to a most extraordinary degree. Cold in the head, cold on the chest, cold in the stomach, cold running to rheumatism, or to cough, or to seed and becoming chronic. It makes me hot to think in how many dreadful forms cold used to attack and prostrate him."

The stranger, not knowing what to say to this, yet conscious that Mr. Grewgious' eyes are emphatically demanding a comment, says, with an expression of surprise and concern—

"Indeed!"

"Of course I felt it my bounden duty not to let the unfortunate young man, so highly talented, fall a prey to cold of any kind on my premises," continues Mr. Grewgious. "I therefore took upon myself to attend to his fire, privately, and without letting him know of my intention. But, unfortunately, I am as liable to forget as he is to take cold, particularly when engrossed in my accounts, and the pangs of conscience I have suffered, when he would hint severely—as he did, sometimes—that cold might turn to inflammation, and inflammation might carry him off in a twinkling, and that then I should have to bear, not only his loss—which, naturally, would be hard upon me—but the whole weight of his



inflamed blood and unfinished tragedies upon my luckless head."

There is a sort of twinkle in Mr. Grewgious' eye at this juncture which rather modifies the tragic solemnity of his words, but it disappears, as he goes on again.

"Now, I am a remarkably wooden man, and stiff in the joints, and indisposed to be much in motion; therefore, as a precautionary measure, I always had his fire made up in the morning very big indeed; but as if possessed by a demoniacal desire to worry me, or perhaps out of pure disgust at finding itself looked upon so coldly by Mr. Bazzard (that's the name) that fire had an almost unnatural propensity for going out. I used to hear him cough or sneeze (a most terrific sneeze, shaking Staple Inn like a small earthquake) and, rushing in frantically (which last I beg to be considered a figure of speech, it being impossible for me to rush) I always found that fire dead or dying."

"You have no idea," goes on Mr. Grewgious, after a short break in his narration in order to replenish his visitor's cup and plate, in spite of the protestations of that satiated individual; "you can have no idea of the bitter reproaches I used to make myself. In imagination—also a figure of speech, for I

haven't any—I saw myself and my name, until yet respectable, branded by indignant contemporaries, and basely defrauded posterity, on account of having been an active agent, or rather inactive one (it may be difficult to understand me, for I am getting into deep waters, and can't swim), in the premature extinguishing of a bright and shining light. I feel his loss, and mine, immensely."

"Why did he leave you?" enquires the stranger, while Mr. Grewgious gulps down his coffee (cold) with as lively an expression of enjoyment as his unfinished features would express, smacking his lips afterwards.

"Ah, that's the best part of the story; and the only thing which reconciles me to my deprivation. His father, a rough, uneducated, unappreciative, remarkably prejudiced man, who couldn't be got to see what a treasure he possessed in a son who composed tragedies and who, in short, was so opposed to 'em that a hint of their existence brought on blood to the head which had to be taken from him in quarts, kept my poor fellow so short of money that he couldn't bring out his master-piece—in confidence, 'A Thorn!'—and even threatened to cut him off with a shilling, if he ever heard another word about it. But (it was a judgment, no doubt,) he

was cut off himself in the midst of his prejudiced career, knocked into the other world by a stroke which he couldn't avert and which prevented him from carrying out his unnatural intention, for ever."

"Violence or apoplexy?" inquires the stranger.

"Apoplexy," says Mr. Grewgious, with solemnity, gently and apologetically shaking his head, as if death were a thing to be disapproved of in the abstract, but that here there were extenuating circumstances. "Blood to the head, you know. He was always subject to it, and there was no one on the spot to draw it off in quarts. Dear, dear! such is life! You should have seen my Genius, when he came to tell me the news."

"He was, no doubt, terribly cast down?"

"Cast down!" says Mr. Grewgious. "Not a bit. Picked up, he was, my poor fellow. He had been cast down enough before. There was no mistake about the money. A small annuity for his mother, a trifle for his sisters, and all the rest of it for the tragedies. You may imagine my feelings when he told me that it was his intention to dedicate his next to me!"

The stranger is understood to murmur that "that was only what you might expect from so very remarkable a clerk."

"Only think of that, to *me!*" continues Mr. Grewgious, complacently. "Only fancy my figuring in a book! Why, if I shut my eyes, I can almost see it: 'Dedicated to my friend, Mr. Hiram Grewgious, Receiver of Rents, of Staple Inn, Holborn; who, in a humble way, always did his best to preserve my life for a grateful country.'"

The stranger, smiling, thinks it would not be like that.

"No? Don't you really?" says Mr. Grewgious, seemingly disappointed. "Well, I dare say you are right. I am a remarkably unimaginative man, and have so little acquaintance with the flowery paths of literature, and so clear a conviction that I should cut the poorest of poor figures there, that perhaps it may be as well if he forgets it. What, you aint going, are you?"

"It is very late, sir, nearly ten; and I fear to weary you."

"A gentlemanly way of telling me that I have wearied you to death," says Mr. Grewgious, smiling; "I've been jabbering and chattering like a lean magpie, or—or—a female. Well, I won't detain you, for you look pale and tired."

Mr. Grewgious screws up his eyes very tight to watch the stranger draw on his gloves

and take his hat, but the mysterious spectacles baffle all his efforts to make out more. Bold, hard, impenetrable, these glassy foreposts effectually hinder him from seeing what he seeks to see ; and he finally smooths his head resignedly."

"When do you wish me to come to you, sir?"

"If you can manage to come to-morrow or, at any rate, as soon as possible, I shall be glad ; for I have at present only a temporary boy" (Mr. Grewgious is again sensible of a pang, as he remembers the painful duty before him) "who helps me mostly, by trying to rid Staple Inn of its sparrows, and the sooner the better for me."

"The sooner the better for me too, sir. I will come to-morrow."

"And here," says Mr. Grewgious, who has been fumbling in his pockets, "here is the first monthly payment."

He is so painfully conscious of the unbusiness nature of this act, that he has drawn out with the purse his pocket-handkerchief, and now noisily applies it to his nose.

But his confusion is as nothing compared to that of the stranger. With a violent rush of colour, that might have been shame, to his pallid face, and with a convulsed lip, as if he

were keeping back by force a rush of words as violent which struggle to free themselves, he faintly raises a deprecatory hand; then, as if yielding to fate stronger than his will, he accepts the money.

“It would be useless to make further assurances,” he says, “but may God bless you, sir, and help me to serve you as you deserve to be served.”

Mr. Grewgious, accompanying his newly-engaged substitute for the never-to-be-forgotten Bazzard, lets him out of the dominion, where P. J. T. had reigned and flourished in and about the year of our Lord seventeen-forty-seven. Waiting to see him cross Staple Inn, and pass out of the gateway, which the porter opens for the purpose, he falls into a short reverie, smoothing his smooth head perplexedly; then, turning, goes back slowly and meditatively to his solitary apartment. Catching a glimpse in passing of the crooked initials over his portal, looking all the more crooked in the flickering lamp-light, a curious fancy seizes him, that they are laughing at him, and that P. J. T., if he could appear in the flesh, or spirit, and become aware of the just-completed transaction, would Precisely Jeer Thereat.

But this fancy is soon driven away by

another fancy which has been vaguely haunting him all through the interview and which now, as he sits exhausted in his easy chair, assumes gigantic proportions, throws him down, and triumphs over him.

“What is it,” he thinks, “in this stranger, upon whom I never set eyes before, to my knowledge, which has kept reminding me all the evening of the dead lad in his unknown grave? It is not his height or figure, for this man is taller and thinner. It is not the colour of his hair, for young Drood’s was brown, and his dark as night. It is not his face, for the lost boy’s was as bright and fresh as a fine morning in May, and his sombre and pallid, like that of a man risen from the grave. It is not his eyes, for I could see nothing of them through those hideous spectacles. It is his voice, perhaps; yet I cannot tell, for it seems an indignity and insult to the dead boy to compare the two, one of which was as clear as the fresh song of the blackbird, while the other sounds as mournful and tuneless as the cry of that bird of night and mystery—the owl.

“I think,” he soliloquizes further, “he must have reminded me of him, by being so unlike him. He made me think of the other, I suppose, because he is so dissimilar; just.

as one freezing at the North Pole might long for the sun of the Meridian; or, one hungering, might dream of costly viands. It must be so, and can be nothing else, so let me dismiss the foolish fancy, and think of something different."

Easier said than done. The foolish fancy sticks to him with a weird and unholy pertinacity. It is of no use to poke his head out of window and take a mouthful of fresh air. Fresh thoughts do not come along with it. The old ones keep buzzing about him like gnats, and sting and worry him till he succumbs to them.

"Very well," he sighs, "let the fancy remain. It does no harm to any one. It even seems to justify an act which the world—I know it—would stigmatise as folly. For his sake, then, for the dead lad's sake, let the man who reminds me of him, by being so unlike him, take up his sojourn in my house."

He rises to light his evening lamp, and let down his blind, but still the merciless thoughts haunt and worry him, refuse to be satisfied with his concession, show no sympathy with the weariness of his body, and clamorously demand an audience. His head is bowed and his face is sorely troubled, as he listens perforce to what they insist on saying.



“I was hard with him that last time, too hard I fear, yet God knows I only meant to do my duty. How his colour changed, and his lip quivered, as I—and who am I, to presume to set myself up as judge in such a matter?—gave him my uncalled for, and, perhaps, mistaken notion of what a true lover ought to feel. Yet I do not think I was mistaken; I do not think I was.”

His head is bowed still lower, and his mien is still sadder and more dejected when the next thought begins.

“I wonder if I shall ever see *her* ring again! Ah me, who can tell me where it may now be lying! Shall I succeed in finding it? If I do, I shall find out something else besides; something to which I have dedicated my life. For I charged him by the living and by the dead, to bring back that ring to me; and I know, I know, by the feeling which mantled on his cheek, that he would have done it if he had lived. Shall I live to see the day when I shall have hunted down the murderer, and avenged the lad’s death? When I do, something tells me I shall find her ring again.”

The next thought comes with a burst, rushing to the attack.

“I do *not* repent what I have done, for

the dead lad's sake ; and would not, even if a thousand spirits sided with P. J. T. to jeer at and mock me. What a strange quiver and thrill there was in his voice, as he asked me if I could not feel and hear that he was honest. I think I could ; I do not repent what I have done, and I am sure I shall not sleep the worse for it to-night.

“Ha! a whistle outside which, reminding me of my erring boy, brings me back to every-day life, and its painful necessities. But is it a necessity? Vowed in a moment of anger, under the influence of which a man loses that divine portion which separates him from the beasts of the field, and becomes as one of them, would it not be perjury to my higher self to carry it out? The power to forgive is certainly the divinest given us. I—I'll warn, and then forgive him. And now I'll go to bed, for I am worn-out and weary.”

A few minutes afterwards the light which has wandered into Mr. Grewgious' bedroom, is extinguished, and P. J. T. alone outside, keeps solitary watch.

## CHAPTER VI.

## TWO INVINCIBLES.

SOME very warm contentions between Miss Twinkleton and the Billickin, which had resulted, as usual, in the utter discomfiture of the former, though nothing would have induced her to admit it, had so oppressed little Rosa on the hot summer day, that her girlish face, looking disconsolately out upon the neighbours from the open window of the best parlour, had an expression of wornness and care which would have troubled her guardian—had he been there to see it—to the very depths of his honest heart. Miss Twinkleton, fanning her flushed face in an easy chair, was too entirely absorbed for the nonce in the state of her own heart and head to pay much attention to anything else; and the state of Miss Twinkleton's heart and head foreboded no good to the landlady who had abandoned the field of conflict a half-an-hour before, faint in body, but triumphant in soul.

“Rosa, my love,” began the elder lady, turning her still agitated face towards her young companion, “I wish you to favour me

with your attention for a few moments. I feel that the impertinence and excessive vulgarity of the person of the house are wearing upon my nerves. The exertion of putting her down is really exhaustive. You see me—that is to say, you will see me, when you have the goodness to look in this direction (somewhat piqued, for Rosa had a quiet tear to wipe away, and did not turn for the moment)—leaning, actually leaning. When, my dear Rosa, when did you ever see me leaning before?”

Rosa, looking round languidly, and becoming aware of this surprising and degenerating fact, remarked that she thought easy chairs were made to lean in, and when people had pains in their back—but got no further, for Miss Twinkleton, drawing her spare figure up to its full height, interrupted her with an indignant protest.

“Pain in the back! When, oh, when did you ever hear me complain of pains in the back? And when you speak of this chair as an ‘easy’ one, you must do so in perfect ignorance of its capabilities for torturing the human frame. Why, it might have been bought cheap,” said Miss Twinkleton, fanning her indignant countenance with energy, “at a sale of the furniture of a chamber of torture from the Inquisition.”

Rosa apologised, gently reminding Miss Twinkleton that she had never tried its imperfections, but did not add that she had never had an opportunity of doing so, for Miss T. had taken possession of it immediately on their arrival, and occupied it ever since, as her prerogative.

“To return to the subject which I wish to lay before you,” continued Miss Twinkleton, mollified by Rosa’s submission; “I intend consulting with your guardian as to the advisability of our quitting these lodgings, and repairing to a more congenial spot for the remainder of the vacation. The necessary business which I had to transact here, is transacted, as you know. I have thought of Brighton—”

Just at this juncture, with the words still upon her lips, and her gloved hand gracefully supporting those words in the air, Miss Twinkleton was brought to a standstill again.

Following a cursory and almost imperative rap, the unwelcome figure of the landlady appeared in the opening door.

The Billickin, who had retired from the scene of her conquest in a sort of exultant swoon, had been brought to in the passage below by the butcher’s boy just entering, who, alarmed by her gasps and angry gestures, had discharged, with admirable presence of

mind, the contents of his tray upon her devoted head. This method, though new to the faculty, had proved wonderfully efficacious. It is hardly likely that any amount of vinegar and water could have given her back so instantaneously such an amount of superfluous vigour, as to enable her to reward her deliverer on the spot with certain sounding coin, eliciting from that hero, howls (doubtless of gratitude).

Under these circumstances, the Billickin, still smeary about the head and face, and with marks of blood upon her cap and apron, presented an appearance calculated to strike horror to the heart of the boldest opponent; and when, with one hand grasping her shawl and the other holding back her troublesome heart, she commenced the attack by hurling the menacing words—"A gentleman for Miss Rosa," direct at Miss Twinkleton's head, the soul of that unfortunate lady quaked within her.

The Billickin would have scorned to have joined hands with those sickly sentimentalists who hold that, when you have conquered an opponent, you ought to pick him up again, and bind up his wounds. No, her brave and honest custom was—to kick him well when he was down.

“Tell the person of the house, my dear,” answered Miss Twinkleton, endeavouring, with very poor success, to speak with calm indifference, though her heart was in her mouth, “that you will receive the gentleman *here*.”

The timid emphasis which Miss Twinkleton laid on the last word was as honey in the mouth of the Billickin. Gathering up her skirts, as if girding up her loins for the battle, she pushed back with renewed energy her obtrusive heart (which, to judge from her action, might have been endeavouring to take part in the controversy), and sarcastically eyeing Miss Twinkleton from top to toe, began again, addressing her words, as usual, ostensibly to Rosa.

“No, miss. Begging your parding for a contradicting of you, no. Which, well I know, them sentiments are not your hown, but forced upon you by a party as shall be nameless (not wishing myself to have hany acquaintance with the party, and ’aving none, thank Evin!), but which may be known, by them as has that wish, by their hankerin’ after a show of youth which is far behind ’em (laughing ironically). So, if you please, miss, the gentleman’s a waiting for you in the back parlour.”

Here the Billickin, releasing her heart from its confinement, leaned with portentous languor against the door.

Rosa, the prettiest picture of confusion and helplessness possible, looked piteously from Miss Twinkleton to the languishing landlady, and stood irresolute.

The excellent schoolmistress's face was very red, and her back, turned towards the Billickin, though as upright as a back could well be, trembled a little, and she began nervously to pull off her gloves (all of which signs and tokens of weakness were keenly noted by her adversary), but when she spoke—clearing her voice which, in spite of her utmost efforts, began huskily—she strove to maintain the calm, decisive tone of one to whom opposition is unknown, and who is certain of obedience. To get into a flurry is to be lost in argument.

“Of course, my dear,” she said, looking fixedly out of the window, though it is more than probable that she saw nothing whatever of what was going on there, “you will tell the person of the house that you receive no gentlemen, particularly no young gentlemen, alone, and that you must repeat your request that he may be conducted to us here.”

But little Miss Twinkleton knew of the



Billickin, if she could indulge for a moment in the vain hope that that lady, even on the point of swooning, would give in. Reviving as completely under the cold words of the schoolmistress as she had done under the contents of the butcher's tray, she came up for a new round, as lively and ready to sting as a bee in a bottle.

"Oh, dear me, miss, don't you really?" she rejoined. "That's only because you are not allowed to, poor thing! But I'll stick up for you. Cut and run, and I'll see that you shan't be interrupted in your tatertate. Don't you heed people, miss, who will tie you to their apron strings and make you old before you are young, out of pure envy and spite, and because they can't abear to see a pretty girl admired as she has the right to be. I've heard of sich," continued the B., looking Miss Twinkleton straight in the face, "but have no wish to make their further acquaintance. Born old maids, as what man would make such a fool of himself and marry sich, which their werry faces is that full of gall, as makes one bilious only to look at 'em."

Almost breathless, the B. paused to clutch her heart again.

She had heard those ominous words of Miss Twinkleton with regard to a change of

lodgings ; and, restrained now by no earthly consideration of a personal nature, she had given her embittered tongue full scope.

Miss Twinkleton's chaste countenance had, indeed, turned quite yellow, as she gnawed her nether lip, and her voice was choked, when she said to Rosa—

“I decline, of course, my love, as a lady by birth and education, to descend to altercation of any kind whatever with the person of the house. Be so good, therefore, as to go and fetch the gentleman yourself. I know I can rely on your discretion and sense of propriety, and trust you implicitly.”

Rosa, heartily glad to be released from her unpleasant position, went quickly out of the room, followed by the exultant landlady who, perhaps thinking she had gone already far enough, made no answer to Miss Twinkleton's last words, only giving vent to her contempt for them by an ironic laugh ; and both descended together the steps to the ground floor.

“It's only the clergyman, miss,” said the landlady, confidentially, “and he didn't ask for you in particular ; but for the ladies. I only wanted to worry the old party, and make her downright mad ; for I can't abear old maids, and partickler such old maids as sets

'emselfs up to be schoolmistresses ; living themselves on the fat of the land, and giving the scrag to their unfort'nate pupils ; and behaves to married women, as is missuses in their own house, I hope, as if they was the dirt under their feet. So, don't you hurry yourself, miss ; the back parlour's quite at your disposal, for I'm agoing to clean myself ; and a mussy I'm still alive to be able to do it, after all that meat upon my head. Let the old party worry herself to death if she will, and a good riddance of bad rubbish."

Rosa, making no answer, opened the door of the back parlour, where the patient clergyman was sitting. He came forward gaily as she entered, holding out both hands to greet her ; and at the sight of his honest, kindly face, a great sob rose up chokingly in the throat of the solitary girl, and tears she could not repress rose to her eyes, sparkling there like jewels in the light of her welcoming smile.

"Oh, Mr. Chrisparkle, how glad I am to see you ! You come like a breath of fresh country air, after the close dullness of this great weary city. And how is Mrs. Chrisparkle, and everybody else in dear old Cloisterham ? Ah, how long the time has seemed since I ran away from it ! and how much I should like to go back again, if—if—"

As she faltered and hesitated, dreading to give utterance to the hated name, the Minor Canon, keenly watching her troubled face, saw how grave and even sad its expression had become.

There was a shadow, as of pain, under the dark eyes, which gave them a depth and womanly earnestness, strange and new to them; the small mouth, slightly lowered at the corners—not peevishly, but sadly—was irresolute and nervous, and the childish roundness of the cheeks had lengthened into a more perfect oval. Yet so innocent and childlike still were the sweet face and wistful eyes, that Mr. Chrisparkle had to remind himself that the little creature before him was a woman now, and a child no longer, or he would have been tempted to take the innocent face between his strong man's hands and kiss away the trouble settling there.

“I have come to talk to you about that,” he began gravely. “There is no need, dear Miss Bud, for you to remain away from Cloisterham any longer on *his* account, for he has given up his situation there, and gone away for good. Another music-master has already taken his place, and leads the choir in our venerable Cathedral.”

Rosa's cheek had blanched a little as the

Minor Canon referred to the dreaded man, and she drew involuntarily closer to him, as if for protection; but the clergyman could not ascertain whether the horrible suspicion which haunted him raised any echo in her breast.

The fear and abhorrence which overcame her even at the mention of his name might merely be the result of his unreturned and terrible love for her, and nothing more. Yet her shrewd perception had come to a conclusion and settled in her mind the true state of things, while his was still wandering in darkness.

But that she feared even to think of the horrors of the past, she might, perhaps, have spoken; but womanly pride and womanly terror kept her lips closed, and the mystery that had gathered so darkly round the lost boy, must remain a mystery until man's patient search and patient watching had found the clue.

Mr. Chrisparkle spoke no word and gave no sign. Yet he, too, set himself on the side of the watchers—watching and waiting till the time of disclosure should arrive.

“Oh, I am quite forgetting Miss Twinkleton,” suddenly exclaimed Rosa, recalled to a sense of the trust reposed in her. “We must

go upstairs at once, Mr. Chrisparkle. She will be fidgetting herself to skin and bone as to what has become of me, and who else is here alone with me in the back parlour. Oh, dear me!" said Rosa, with dimpling cheeks, and tossing back her bright curls, "what a fuss poor dear Miss Twinkleton will be in!"

"Let us at once relieve her anxiety," said the gallant Minor Canon, smiling, though not without a prick of conscience at having forgotten to enquire for that estimable lady. "My motto, and I hope my practice is, never to keep a lady waiting."

And yet, as he followed the sedate little maiden, with that shower of soft, wavy hair, he was mentally calculating how much weariness it might have taken to have so quickly subdued her childish impetuosity and to have ripened her so speedily into a woman, and very heedless of the much more important consideration of Miss T.'s valued health.

That lady's elaborate curtsy having been disposed of, and acknowledged by a most profound bow from the polite Minor Canon, and she once more settled in that inquisitorial article of furniture—the easy chair—the Rev. Sept paved the way to easy conversation (perhaps his experience of the gentler

sex taught him that it was a probate one) by a compliment.

“No need to inquire after your health, Miss Twinkleton, for, as I see, you are blooming wonderfully here in London, casting us poor country folks quite into shadow.”

“You find me, sir,” rejoined Miss Twinkleton, in whose virgin breast the venomous arrow cast by the Billickin still rankled, “in a state of mind not calculated, according to my poor opinion, to renovate or invigorate the body. And the flush you observe on my countenance,” she continued, with some sharpness, “is by no means occasioned—as you seem to imagine—by robust health, but is rather the natural and inevitable result of the daily conflict which I have to maintain with the person of the house.”

Now it happened that in acknowledging this fact, which her dignity would have sought to ignore—for can a philosopher stoop to dispute with his laundress, or a prince with his valet?—Miss Twinkleton’s feelings ran away with her discretion, as has occurred once or twice, perhaps, to others before her, therefore becoming suddenly aware that she had somewhat betrayed her weakness, she coloured still more deeply, bit her lips a little savagely, and fanned herself more energetically than ever.

Rather discomfited, for he could not but see that he had roughened the way, instead of smoothing it, the Minor Canon inwardly and wisely determined never again to pay a compliment without being sure of its being well-received beforehand. He was then understood to remark, that colour, like many other things, was often deceptive, and while expressing his sympathy with the lady's sufferings, offered himself as her champion against the offending landlady, with somewhat superfluous energy.

But his assurances were brought to an untimely end by Rosa's clear laugh which, ringing through the room and out into the hot, sunshiny street, sounded, for the moment, almost as merry and lighthearted as in the old days at Cloisterham. She was imagining the Revd. Septimus Chrisparkle, Minor Canon in Cloisterham, in a wordy conflict with the Billickin—the vigour of the onset, and the completeness of the defeat. And neighbour's little Johnny, on the doorstep opposite, stopped crying to lift up his round eyes and tearstained face to the open window, and the pretty, sorrowful lady who could laugh like that. And he forgot his boxed ears and hard step-mother who was always finding out something he ought not to have done, or something he had forgotten to



do, and thought of his own mother, now an angel in heaven; then laid his poor little hot head upon the hard stones to sleep the sleep of innocence.

Rosa's clear laugh was so infectious, that the Minor Canon caught it on the spot, in spite of Miss Twinkleton's antidotal nods, and waves of the hand; he was so glad to see sunshine again in the girl's sorrowful face, all the sadder to see in connection with its fresh youthfulness. Even Johnny smiled, while his blue eyes were closing, and only Miss Twinkleton sat smileless, in sedate and offended dignity, waving them back into propriety again.

"It is in very bad taste, my dear," she said, with severity, addressing Rosa, but glancing sideways at the abashed Minor Canon, who hung his head far more like a frightened school girl than did Rosa, who didn't seem to mind it much, "to burst out into a fit of laughter, without beforehand explaining the reason why. It is always unladylike to laugh loudly; a gentle smile is the utmost in which a gentlewoman should indulge, and then only when the example is given her. To laugh, and particularly to laugh loudly, is decidedly vulgar, and shows a lamentable want of refinement."

During the delivery of this homily, Miss

Twinkleton seemed to be recovering her lost spirits amazingly ; and the sight of the prostrate Minor Canon proved so complete a balsam for her wounded self-esteem, that she became quite preceptorially gay.

“Why, I might have thought,” she said quite good humouredly, though with the manner of one to whom the notion of such audacity never could really have occurred, “that you were laughing at me.”

This so nearly set Rosa off again, that only the sight of the distressed Minor Canon prevented a fresh burst. She hastened to come to his rescue and explain.

“Don’t be angry, dear Miss Twinkleton. You know I always was a silly, giddy little thing, and I could not help thinking how funny it would be to see Mr. Chrisparkle and Mrs. Billickin in a discussion, for you know, he would have the worst of it in next to no time.”

“So I had better not try,” said the Minor Canon, “but keep clear of this formidable woman. There are times when discretion is the better part of valour. And you can’t knock a woman down after all, however much she may deserve it; even if knocking down were, under any circumstances, consistent with my cloth.”

“No,” said Rosa, “but she might knock you down, and when she had, oh, how she would trample on you, and buffet you! She doesn’t know what mercy means, and her only notion of a fallen adversary is, that she has him more completely in her power.”

“You make my flesh creep,” said the Revd. Sept. pretending to shudder.”

“Then you will have some sympathy with our sufferings, and some notion of what we have been enduring,” said Rosa, mischievously glancing at Miss Twinkleton, upon whose intellectual brow the scattered shadows had returned since the mention of the landlady’s baleful name. “But, hush! I hear her on the stairs.”

The sudden glance of terror which Miss Twinkleton cast at the door, was so spontaneous and involuntary, that it spoke volumes. This excellent instructress of youth, so formidable in the eyes of defaulting members of the Nuns’ House, conscious of unlearned lessons; or tart crumbs in their beds; or stray glances cast during church service towards some member of the masculine half of youth in the sanctuary, had evidently found more than her match in the Billickin. Fortunately the alarm was a false one. It was only the housemaid with a letter;

but it set Miss Twinkleton to vindicating her character, and clearing herself from the barest suspicion of cowardice.

“I am sure,” she said, after a pause, during which she affected to be examining the post mark on the letter, but in reality was composing her agitated countenance, which still showed an untoward propensity to twitch, “that Mr. Chrisparkle will not suppose me to be capable of entertaining that weak and unworthy sentiment, denominated fear, of a person so far removed from me in the social scale, and whose feeble impertinences, which Rosa much exaggerates, I could, if I would, crush instantaneously (Mr. Chrisparkle caught himself wondering why she wouldn’t). We are not afraid,” continued Miss Twinkleton, in a sprightlier tone, “of a mosquito or a gnat, though they sting; but we do not expose ourselves voluntarily to their tiny instruments of torture.”

Mr. Chrisparkle was eagerly about to adduce various experiences of his own in this respect, and to relate anecdotes of times and seasons when he had been stung by both mosquitoes and gnats. He was even going further to explain that some naturalists were of opinion that the only difference between these two small plagues was a difference of

climate—when Miss Twinkleton waved him into silence again. It was astounding how ill at ease the Minor Canon felt, and with what difficulty appropriate words rose to his tongue, but it was a peculiarity of this excellent lady to speedily reduce gentlemen to this condition, and bring down their opinion of themselves to a minimum.

“My position in Cloisterham ought to be a guarantee, and I hope is, that I know how to maintain my authority, and uphold my dignity under all circumstances,” continued Miss Twinkleton, extremely anxious to re-establish herself in the Revd. Sept’s opinion. “The young ladies in my establishment, although invariably treated with the most judicious kindness (which does not consist in pampering to their foolish fancies) and discreet indulgence, when they have committed any little fault or indiscretion, tremble in my presence; not from fear of correction, but at the glance of my reproving eye.”

It was well for naughty Rosa, that that self-same eye was severely directed towards the opposite houses, and heedless of her, for the nonce. For she was wickedly gesticulating with an imaginary rod right before the nose of the Minor Canon, who was coughing sus-

piciously behind his open hand. But when Miss Twinkleton looked round, before continuing, they were both regarding her with grave and respectful attention.

“The domestics employed in my institution are accustomed to implicitly obey my directions with a reverence not unmingled with awe; the masters accommodate themselves invariably to my regulations, and testify for me on all occasions a deep and heartfelt respect. One master, a Frenchman, said ‘it made him shiver to look at me;’ naturally, on those occasions, when his native levity had caused him to depart from that staid and sober deportment, which my regulations direct. I am confident,” concluded Miss Twinkleton, looking at the Minor Canon with a frigid challenge to contradict her if he dared, and causing him, particularly in the small of the back, to participate in the sentiment of the Frenchman, “that you do not doubt my ability to cope with the person of the house, if I should choose to abase myself to the effort.”

Mr. Chrisparkle’s frosty condition thawed a little under the warmth of his assurances that he did not. He seemed willing to assert this, and stick to it, in the face of a contradictory world.

“Therefore,” continued Miss Twinkleton, in a milder tone, “the resolution which I have already communicated to Rosa, and which now I repeat to you, to the effect that we must change our place of abode, is not occasioned by puerile cowardice, or fear of any human being whatever, still less of the upstart person of the house. But mosquitoes bite and gnats sting,” said Miss Twinkleton, returning to her former smile with the smile of a gentlewoman, “and instead of crushing these creatures—which, no doubt, have their usefulness in the all-wise order of things—let us go to a place where they are not.”

“Why, that is odd,” said Mr. Chrisparkle, “or, rather, even, for it fits in with a plan of mine exactly, or, I should say, with a plan of ma’s. I came specially to make a proposal this afternoon, about something ma has set her heart on.”

He glanced at Rosa as he spoke. The childish burst of gaiety was over, leaving the sadness, which had re-settled on the young face, all the more apparent after it. She was sitting looking listlessly out of the window, with an expression of profound weariness. Mr. Chrisparkle’s face grew a shade less cheerful as he enquired if Miss Twinkleton meant to go back to Cloisterham at once?

“No, revd. sir. A fortnight’s rest from toil still remains to us; a fortnight’s pause before resuming those arduous labours which, though dear, often weigh heavily upon us—poor, yet proud, educators of our sex. You find me, now that the flush has faded, pale. You find Rosa pale. I have thought of spending these few fleeting days at the sea-side. I have thought of Brighton, if Mr. Grewgious should approve. The sea breeze will give us back our faded roses. Strengthened in body, invigorated in soul, we then return to Cloisterham.”

Miss Twinkleton was not particularly referring to Rosa when she used the word “we,” which she did in an editorial sort of way, and as an enhancement of her personal dignity. Satisfied, apparently, that she had sufficiently asserted herself, and proved her invincibility, she now appeared in a new and startling light, wherein she seemed to the alarmed Minor Canon still more appalling, and under the influence of which he grew hot, instead of shivery.

“Ah, dear sir!” she said, letting her faded blue eyes rest upon him, with a shade of sadness, and more than a shade of sentimentality in her voice, called up there by sudden, tender remembrance of “foolish Mr. Porter,”



“believe me, there are times when we poor, maligned educators of our sex—forced into the position by a stern destiny—would gladly indulge in those little weaknesses which other women have so large a right to enjoy; there are times (after school hours, and in the privacy of our own apartments) when we would gladly lay down our arms and become weak. For the improvement of our own sex we learn to suffer and be strong. But, alas! strength is apt to be viewed by you gentlemen as an unwomanly attribute in the fair sex. Weakness is, after all, our only available weapon in contending with *you*.”

With a sigh, half too real, half sentimentally called into being for the occasion, Miss Twinkleton looked dreamily out of the open window, as if wondering if ever, or how soon, her implacable destiny would allow her to make use of that formidable weakness for the destruction of the male portion of mankind in general, and of Minor Canons in particular; while the Revd. Sept, extremely alarmed, hastened to change the dangerous tone of the conversation. He began to feel that it was high time he should go.

“I think your plan of removing to Brighton for the next fortnight,” he said, “is an excellent one; and I feel almost sure that Mr.

Grewgious will consent to it on behalf of his ward. But a fortnight is soon over, and then—and that is the question which brought me here to-day—what is to become of Miss Bud ? ”

“ I have thought of that, too,” answered Miss Twinkleton, forgetting her own sentimental sorrows in the real ones of her young charge, and glancing towards her with unaffected and kindly sympathy.

Rosa’s burst of childish thoughtlessness was over, and she was sitting, grave enough now, with clasped hands and bowed head, listening mechanically to the two, yet scarcely heeding, even when they began to talk of her. What did it matter what became of her, or where she went ? The restless resistance to grief and pain, so natural to youth, had given place to an apathetic yielding to her fate, far less natural and infinitely sadder to contemplate.

What mother, what physician would not prefer to see a suffering child screaming lustily at the pain, fighting against it with tiny feet and hands, than lying still, with closed eyes and drooping limbs, to bear it. Strenuous opposition to the malady is the first step towards the cure. Disbelief in death, the strongest sign of life !

How dull and heavy seemed to the girl her future life as she sat hearing it discussed! How infinitely little worth the trouble! Where were all the bright day-dreams which she had dreamed in the Nuns' House, and chattered about, full of confident hope in their fulfilment, to other girls, who had the same sweet visions!

How bright had been the morning of the day now so heavily clouded! How hard and uninteresting seemed the future; as hard and uninteresting as the red-brick houses opposite, glaring in the sunshine! What was it that had produced a change so entire, and made everything, not less clear, but oh! so much less beautiful? How was it that the sunbeams' formerly bewildering rays from God's own heaven, were nothing but dull heat to her now? What was this strange dissonance which had come into the harmony of her life? Oh, God! was it for ever?

Smarting tears, blighting and not healing, were falling slowly upon her little apron as the two turned to look at her. The words died on Miss Twinkleton's lips, and she paused to wipe away a sympathetic tear which had gathered in her own eye; then, in a softer voice, for Mr. Chrisparkle's ear alone, she continued—

“Yes, I have thought of that. Of all my pupils, no one has ever had so strong a hold on my affections as the orphan child who knew no other home than mine. I never thought of her quitting it but for the home and heart of her affianced husband. The terrible fate which has separated them has upset all our plans for her future; but the time will come when some one else will find out the attractions of my pretty one; and time, too, will heal her sorrows, and prepare her to accept another. Until such time, let her, if she will, return with me to the Nuns’ House; not as a pupil, of course, but as a beloved and cherished young friend. Rosa, my love, I am proposing to Mr. Chrisparkle that you should come and live with me for the present at the Nuns’ House. Would you like to do so?”

Rosa sprang up. A bright colour flushed her face. It seemed to her, for the moment, as if a return to the old outward life would be a return to the old inward life too; as if, in going back to the Nuns’ House, she would become again the Rosebud of the past. She had almost exclaimed, “Oh, yes, dear Miss Twinkleton, let me go back with you; let me be once more the little spoiled, petted girl, whose only trouble was the occasional one of your reproof,” when she remembered.

No power can reunite the fallen apple to the tree which bore it to its ripening. Once started on the path which leads from birth to death—there is no turning back, no possibility of lingering on the road. On, on ever, through sunshine and through rain; through gardens strewn with flowers and sheltering thickets, out into a barren wilderness, where no water is, to the valley of the shadow of death, and the death beyond it. There is no turning back in life to linger in the shade! Even her young experience told her that. With a loving, grateful gesture she took Miss Twinkleton's hand, and pressed it to her lips, but her wistful eyes were turned towards Mr. Chrisparkle, beseeching him to give utterance to the negative, which her loving lips hesitated to pronounce.

He understood her instantly, and hastened to her assistance.

"I was going to beg you, dear madam," he began, "to allow Miss Bud to accompany me to Mr. Grewgious on a little matter of business, and we will lay your kind offer before his consideration. I have a proposal to make on my own account too, or, as I should say, on ma's, and the decision must rest, of course, with him, as Miss Bud's guardian."

Miss Twinkleton giving her gracious permission to this, Rosa withdrew to make ready,

returning in a few minutes looking so sweet and fair that the Revd. Sept would have been hardly a man had he not secretly congratulated himself on his good fortune in being permitted to escort so charming a girl. And when she slipped her little hand within his arm, as a matter of course, and they passed out together into the hot and dusty street, his complacency was at its height.

## CHAPTER VII.

## A SELFISH PROPOSAL.

“THAT is a very excellent lady!” said the Minor Canon, gravely, as he and Rosa paced the dusty streets together.

“And I love her dearly,” responded Rosebud, raising her face wistfully to Mr. Chrisparkle’s, “she has always been a kind and true friend to me.”

Having thus relieved their somewhat burdened consciences, the two relapsed into silence again. The Minor Canon, it is true, made some effort to keep up conversation, but Rosa seemed in so meditative a mood, and responded so monosyllabically to his remarks that, respecting her evident wish for silence, he occupied himself with what was going on around him; only carefully supporting her small figure on his strong arm, and guiding her tiny feet clear of all obstacles.

That part of Holborn through which they were passing was thronged with people, seeking towards evening that which the hot and thunderous atmosphere of the day had failed to yield them, a breath of cooling air.

Dust lay thick everywhere, upon the hot and stifling houses, with windows and doors wide open, as if they too, were panting for fresh air; upon the burning pavement, where the heated and irritated passers-by jostled and crowded one another; upon the pale faced, peevish children, dragging back reluctantly from the hands which led them; upon the perspiring shopmen, who having nothing else to do, peered out of every available opening, perhaps speculating upon the chance of some stray breeze, fresh from the river, or from the still more distant ocean, having lost its way and wandered there; upon the rattling omnibuses, empty inside, but doubly piled up without; upon the foaming horses, bathed in sweat; upon the suffering passengers, grumbling and grimy; upon the tarts and jellies at the confectioners, where it struggled for the supremacy, with myriads of gorging and gluttonous flies; upon the ices, even in the short interval between their being manufactured and consumed; upon the sturdy policemen at the corners of the streets; even upon Rosa's pretty bonnet, and the Minor Canon's own clerical black suit, which on the road had turned to iron-grey. Every whiff or faint apology for a breeze brought the inevitable dust along with it; every rattle of



the piled-up omnibuses and the jaded cabs showered it upon the crowd. Gritty, grindy, dusty High Holborn, defied even the watermen with their watering barrels, and laughed to scorn every attempt to make it other than it was. Very glad indeed was Mr. Chrisparkle to get his charge safely out of this highly-populated Sahara into the comparatively cool oasis of Staple Inn.

Coming out of the gateway as they entered was a man, so white-faced and sombre, so shadow-like and spectral, that Rosa passing him, uttered a little cry. Strange to say, this cry was repeated, echoed by the man himself. Perhaps she had startled him; perhaps something else was agitating him, for he staggered heavily and would have fallen but that Mr. Chrisparkle's strong, athletic arm caught and held him.

Strange to see, this sombre man, without a word of thanks, without a syllable of acknowledgment, or explanation, almost wrenched himself from the Minor Canon's strong support, and covering his face, went his way. He walked so unsteadily and falteringly, that the Minor Canon who had turned in surprise to watch him, thought he would have fallen again, but he kept on and never once turned back. Then the Rev.

Sept, turning round to Rosa, saw that she too had turned deadly pale and was tremblingly clinging to his arm.

"The man frightened you," he said. "No wonder, he must have been intoxicated."

"It was like a ghost," she answered, shivering, and added under her breath, "like the ghost of Eddy!"

"This is a most unexpected pleasure," so Mr. Grewgious welcomed them, "and to what most fortunate combination of circumstances am I indebted for it? I was sitting here, after a hard day's work, in a state of melt—if so hard-favoured a man as I am, may be allowed to participate in the general condition of humanity, on this tropical occasion—and my mind reverted, naturally reverted to my ward, to my charming ward, who occupies so much, nay, nearly all, of my leisure opportunities for thought; but I never imagined her so near."

Rosa raised his hard hand to her soft lips, with a pretty apologetic expression on her still agitated face.

"My dear," responded Mr. Grewgious, "my hand hardly knows how to deport itself under so much honour. Really," he continued, viewing that member with admiration, as if her gentle kiss had transformed it into

pure gold, or sparkling diamonds, "you must never do that again, my dear, you really must not; for my hand would then, I feel sure, refuse ever to work again, on plea of having become ennobled."

Rosa smiling at this, and Mr. Chrisparkle laughing heartily, Mr. Grewgious came back to a sense of his responsibility as host.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, "and take off your hat, and we will consider what refreshment would be most suitable to the occasion. Would you like a glass of lemonade or iced champagne; or would you prefer anything else whatever?"

Rosa wanted nothing; they were come on business; at least Mr. Chrisparkle had said so.

"But business, my dear," expostulated Mr. Grewgious, "is so very dry a subject, particularly for a young lady, that it will be absolutely necessary to moisten it with something. My clerk, my new clerk, who has come in the place of Mr. Bazzard, is just gone home—you must almost have met him, I should think—or I could have asked *him* to run over to Furnival's, though now I come to consider it, I really do not think I should have liked to do so, he is so much the gentleman. Bazzard was a gentleman too, there is

no doubt about that, of course, a gentleman and a genius ; but this one is so much more the gentleman, that perhaps it is fortunate that he is gone ; for, on consideration, I really should not like to have asked him. So i you will excuse me for a moment, and I *shall* only be a moment, I assure you, then I will go myself."

Suiting the action to the word, and before they had time to stop him, he was gone, bare-headed ; and before they had time to think about his being gone, was back again.

"There," he exclaimed, panting, seating himself with much deliberation in his easy chair, and mopping energetically the huge drops of moisture from his face ; "there, my dear, what do you say to that, for an angular man ? Why, it's the lovely presence in my room, that oils my bones, lubricates my stiff joints, and makes me active and alert as a lad in his teens. Furnival's are most attentive, and will be here directly, my love, with your iced champagne, and while you are cooling yourself with that, we—my reverend friend and myself—will cool ourselves with something heavier."

"You are too kind," said the Rev. Sept, smiling, "and I feel quite ashamed to give you so much trouble, and to have given Miss

Bud so much trouble on this hot, dusty day, to hear only, after all, a selfish proposal of mine."

"Selfish!" echoed Mr. Grewgious, thoughtfully, "that would be quite new and quite unexpected, coming from you, reverend sir; would it not, my dear?"

Rosa nodded, though in an absent sort of way, and sipped her iced champagne which, in the meantime, had arrived, accompanied by something heavier for the gentlemen.

Mr. Grewgious eyed his ward thoughtfully through his mopping fingers, and eyed her again still more thoughtfully, during the cooling process with something heavier, for there was a look upon her face which he did not like to see there.

"And now," continued Mr. Grewgious, after a short pause, during which they all sipped, or watched the dusty sparrows, hopping about disconsolately on the dusty pavement, and seeking vainly something cool, or something green; "now, reverend sir, if you are feeling somewhat better, and my ward is refreshed, why, I am too, and we might begin either with that little piece of business you spoke of, or with the *selfish* proposal you are about to make."

With a strong emphasis on the word, and

with a twinkling eye, or as nearly one as he could make it, directed towards Rosa, Mr. Grewgious endeavoured jocosely to draw her into the conversation; but her bright orbs remaining fixed intently upon the sparkling wine: Mr. Grewgious' eye lost its twinkle, and he mopped himself again profusely, and somewhat dejectedly.

Mr. Chrisparkle commenced by relating all that had lately happened in Cloisterham; dwelling particularly upon the fact that Mr. Jasper had resigned his situation there, and had taken up his abode for the present in London.

"I came up with him yesterday morning," continued the clergyman, "though not for the pleasure of his company; and before that ma and I had a long talk together. You know, Mr. Grewgious, that unfortunately ma does not quite agree with us in some particulars, but though ma's judgment may be wrong sometimes, her heart never is, and when I mentioned it, ma was quite taken with it directly, and begged me to lose no time in coming up and speaking to you about it; and ma hopes, and I hope, that you will agree to it, and that Miss Bud may approve of it, which would make us very happy."

"I have no doubt whatever," interposed

Mr. Grewgious, "that we should and shall, when we know what 'it' is; and as we are, figuratively, sitting upon thorns to hear it—though it does not become me to attempt comparisons; for what do I know about figures, except those in my counting-books, and as for thorns, I have had enough of them to last me my lifetime, without introducing 'em uncalled for—I am sure we shall both agree in begging you to bring 'it' out as soon as quite convenient."

Casting a cheerful glance at his ward, and encountering only a downcast and troubled little face, Mr. Grewgious shook his head remonstratively; and then, apparently fearing it had become terribly ruffled, smoothed it the wrong way so energetically that, if at all electric, it must have emitted sparks of fire.

"And ma thinks, and I think," continued Mr. Chrisparkle, who was far too much in earnest with his subject to notice the perturbation of Mr. Grewgious or the silence of his ward, "that as that dreadful man has left Cloisterham, and as Miss Bud is accustomed to Cloisterham and was happy there, and as we know that you are still undecided as to where she shall go at the end of the holidays, that if you approved, and she approved, she might come to us."

Mr. Grewgious, brightening, again looked at Rosa; who, very pale, and with a doubtful, pondering look, and anxious and knitted little brow, seemed so absorbed in her own thoughts as to be hardly conscious of their presence, and even yet gave no response.

“As far as I am concerned,” said Mr. Grewgious, with troubled earnestness, “I thank you gratefully; as far as my ward is concerned, I should have thought that such a proposal would have met with her certain and full approbation; but she is silent. She may have formed other plans for herself, which it will be our duty carefully to consider, and to weigh thoroughly. My ward is silent—let her speak.”

“Minor Canon Corner,” continued Mr. Chrisparkle, still cheerfully, though with a very perceptible fall in his voice, “is a quiet spot. I have never found it dull; but a young lady has other wishes and other wants than mine, and a home inhabited by an old lady and a middle-aged clergyman may be—nay, perhaps, must be—dull, and have too little brightness for her. Nevertheless, I must say, in justice to myself, that ma and I had not forgotten this and had planned a hundred little plans to make it brighter, and as Miss Bud would have been near her old



home, and among her old friends, we thought it might have met with her approbation. I may say also, I hope, for myself, and I am sure I may say for ma, that we would have done our poor utmost to make her happy."

Both gentlemen now looked at Rosa. Feeling that, perhaps, or struck by the sudden silence, she started, changed colour, and, looking back at them with wide, wondering eyes, came to herself and to a knowledge of where she was.

"What was it you said?" she asked, pressing a bewildered and trembling little hand to her head. "I was so lost in thought that I did not quite understand you."

"Mr. Chrisparkle, my love," began Mr. Grewgious, "has proposed your returning to Cloisterham and taking up your abode for the present in his house. I am free to confess that my mind has been seeking anxiously a suitable home for you, and has come to no result. I am free to confess that Mr. Chrisparkle's offer—so kind and generous—has lightened my heart of a load. Nevertheless, the decision rests with you, my dear. If you have formed any other wish, if you have made any other plan, or, simply if you have any objection to make to this, mention it freely."

“And do not let any consideration for me, or any consideration for ma,” put in the Rev. Sept, his honest face glowing from the eagerness with which he spoke, “influence you in the very least ; for though, of course, there is plenty of selfishness in our wishing to secure so much brightness for our quiet home, yet that has not been our only motive either ; and though I left ma wandering from room to room, uncertain which you would like best, and in a state of bewildered delight at the prospect of having, as it were, a little daughter to care for ; yet we would not for a moment wish to induce you to act in opposition to any scheme you may have planned, or urge you—”

“But you will let me thank you, will you not,” said Rosa, rising, and putting both her hands into those of the delighted clergyman, “and you will let me tell you that if I could have my choice of all the happy homes in happy England, there is not one—there is not one—that I would choose in preference to yours.”

Mr. Grewgious’ puckered face smoothing of its own accord at this, he considered the occasion propitious for smoothing his head again, and did so (this time the right way) accordingly.

“And if,” continued Rosa, with tears in her bright eyes, “if a poor little careless thing who, until now, has only been a trouble and an anxiety to all about her; who till now has only been able to repay with love and affection—and not always with enough of that—those who have been kind to her, dare make assurances, then take hers that she will try to be a comfort, and not a trouble only, to her kind friends; and do her very best, poor though that best may be, to make them never regret having taken her in.”

The Rev. Sept, opening his mouth here to make assurances, she stopped him, with her hand upon her lip, and went on again—

“And if, as may sometimes be the case, though not often, she hopes, the troubles which have borne heavily upon her may cast their shadow over her, and partially also, from their sympathy, over her generous friends, so noble and true, she will try, oh, so hard, to conquer the sadness, to rise superior to the despondency, to shake off the doubts and fears. God helping her, she will do so, and her friends will have patience with her, and help her, too.”

Rosa's small figure seemed to grow as she spoke, and a steadiness and continuity of purpose, hardly to have been sought for in

the childish beauty, compressed her small mouth, and shone brightly in her steadfast eyes.

Mr. Chrisparkle and her guardian contemplated her with wonder and admiration, though the latter slightly and almost imperceptibly shook his head.

Meeting their astonished glance, she smiled ; nay, laughed aloud at the sight of Mr. Grewgious' dishevelled locks which, from constant smoothing, first one way, and then the other, had compromised matters by remaining at last stark upright, making of him a popular impersonation of fright. With the laugh she became the old Rosebud again, at least, the same externally.

"And now," said Mr. Grewgious, "that matter being settled, and settled to all our satisfactions, I am sure (don't let your champagne get cold, my dear, that is to say, I mean the opposite, but being a man with such remarkably confused ideas, I generally do mean the opposite of what I say, or rather, say the opposite of what I mean), when do you wish my ward to come to you, reverend sir ; and when, my dear, do you wish to go ?"

Mr. Chrisparkle here mentioned Miss Twinkleton's wishes with regard to Brighton,

and Mr. Grewgious heartily coincided in them.

“Let us say, then, a fortnight from this time,” said Mr. Grewgious, “that will allow your excellent mother plenty of time for deciding between the blue room or the green, and in making any other arrangements she may deem necessary. And now, my dear, what can I do for you before you go?”

Rosa, with a hanging head and a blushing cheek, would dearly like to see Helena.

“So you shall, my dear, so you shall; I will run across at once to Mr. Tartar’s, and I have no doubt his rooms will be at your disposal.”

Rosa, hiding her face still more, and colouring, until the tips of her pretty fingers were rosy red too, answered hesitatingly that she wanted to see Helena quite close this time; it—it wasn’t like the same thing through a window.

“I understand,” said Mr. Grewgious, putting his finger knowingly on one side of his nose, and nodding slyly at his ward. “When young ladies meet, bless their hearts!—I’ve seen ’em at it once or twice, and,” continued Mr. Grewgious, “a most uncommon pretty sight it was—they fall into one another’s arms, they clasp one another round

the waist, they bring their rosy lips together. Why," continued Mr. Grewgious, dilating on his theme with the delight of an epicure, "it's most natural; it's only what other people would like to do too, if they dared."

Rosa joined heartily in Mr. Chrisparkle's merry laugh; but, as she laughed, her blushes deepened.

"And to think," added Mr. Grewgious, sympathetically, "of two beautiful beings, with all the lovely and loving emotions of their sex agitating their bosoms; to think of their being separated by a chasm, when their hearts are full of the delight of meeting, full and running over. Why, my dear, you are quite right; you are perfectly and comprehensibly right."

Rosa, delighted to see how readily he was marching in a wrong direction, and greatly relieved to find how little her real motive was comprehended by him, recovered somewhat from her confusion, and courageously met his eye.

"And now, my dear, we must consider how we can best manage it; for you wouldn't, and we all of us shouldn't, wish to do anything rashly, or to put our young friends opposite into any sort of danger."

"Oh, no," said Rosa, with a deep breath.

"Did you not tell me, reverend sir," continued Mr. Grewgious, "that our local friend is now in London?"

"I left him at the station, sir, and lost sight of him in the fog."

"And you have no clue to the reason for his giving up his situation so abruptly?"

"None whatever, except that I fear he wishes to have more time and opportunity to pursue his investigations, and to carry out his schemes for revenge."

"Ah, he is up to no good, is our local friend, we may be sure of that," said Mr. Grewgious, "and it behoves us, therefore, to be very careful; yet I should be sorry to disappoint my ward."

"I propose," said Mr. Grewgious again, after a moment's thought, with his hand on his ruffled locks, "that we, each of us, look out for an idea. The first who finds an idea speaks. When I say three," said Mr. Grewgious, lifting his hand, "let us sit still and ponder. One, two, three, and begin."

Bringing down his hand upon the table before him with a vehemence which startled the sparrows outside so effectually that, abandoning their fruitless search for that day, they flew to roost, Mr. Grewgious composed himself into an attitude of deep reflection,

while Rosa and Mr. Chrisparkle, following his directions, sat in solemn silence, waiting for the birth of an idea. Perhaps they had never felt in their lives so completely destitute of one.

For a few succeeding minutes nothing was to be heard in the room, save the loud ticking of the clock, the occasional tread of a foot-step outside, and the distant roar from the city; then Mr. Grewgious began to exhibit signs of internal commotion. He breathed more quickly, screwed up both eyes tightly, exhibited tokens of strangulation, and hurriedly loosened his cravat. The birth was at hand.

"Have you found an idea yet, reverend sir?" he enquired, abruptly, still in a state of agitation, and looking out of window.

"I have turned the subject carefully over in my mind," answered the Revd. Sept, "but no plan, at all feasible, has occurred to me."

"And you, my dear?"

But Rosa's usually busy little brain had almost seemed to stand still during the interval, and she shook her head.

"I hope you won't consider it presumptuous," went on Mr. Grewgious, slowly, yet in a voice of smothered excitement, and with his screwed-up eyes still turned towards the



window, "to have hit upon an idea before you, as I think I have. It isn't, by any means, because I am so flush of 'em; for I was born without ideas almost, and might have remained here until doomsday without finding one, but that I am sitting, as you perceive, with my face towards the window, and have had, therefore, the opportunity, which you have not, of viewing Staple Inn, and seeing what was going on there. And what is it that my short-sighted eyes have gradually been taking in? Why, a slouching form, a slinking figure, an evil eye; to sum up all devilish unpleasantness in a word, my idea has appeared before me in bodily shape, and is—Look out of window, Mr. Chrisparkle—Shut your pretty eyes, my lamb—our local friend."

Rosa, with an exclamation of terror which she could not repress, drew closer to her guardian, and clung to his protecting arm.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said Mr. Grewgious, looking down upon the girl's shrinking figure with the tenderest compassion in his unfinished features, "for Mr. Chrisparkle is on one side of you, and *I* am on the other. If our local friend (whose intentions, no doubt, are evil, and whom I beg to be permitted, parenthetically and *sotto*

*voce*, to blast and blight) should venture to approach you, or even to cast one baleful glance in your direction, he would be crushed. And, when I say crushed," continued Mr. Grewgious, with a flushed face and an angry gesture, "I mean what I say, and mean crushed to fragments."

"If he could have known!" Rosa thought, trembling, as she knelt down beside him, and hid her pale face upon his shoulder. But he only knew, as he laid his arm gently and protectingly around her, that she would never appeal to him in vain for help and for support; he only knew, as he looked once more defiantly across the way, that his old arm would grow strong and vigorous again to annihilate her enemies; he only knew that the soft touch of her round cheek against his was bringing up the warm blood there as hotly as in the days of his youth, and reviving sweet memories, scarcely tasted, but never to be forgotten; for he was but mortal, and could not read the thoughts of her agitated and frightened heart.

"Our local friend," continued Mr. Grewgious, when Rosa had a little recovered from the shock of knowing that dreadful man to be so near her, "has retired into the apartment which I pointed out to you once before,

reverend sir, and in which he seems to concoct his hellish plans. Under the circumstance of our local friend being there in *propria persona*—which is not alarming, my dear, and only means that he is there himself; though to be sure that is unpleasant enough”—(this to Rosa, who had shuddered)—“I think I see the way clear to gratify my ward.”

“Pray tell us how!” said the Minor Canon.

“Let me first propound a question,” said Mr. Grewgious, deliberately, with the manner of an acute lawyer, whom nothing could induce to go indiscreetly direct to the heart of the matter. “Do you intend to visit Mr. Neville?”

“I thought of going to him to-morrow morning,” answered the Revd. Sept, “before returning to Cloisterham.”

“Would you object to make your visit this evening?”

“Not in the least, if you wish it.”

“I have noticed,” continued Mr. Grewgious, “that Mr. Neville usually takes his walks in the evening, and indeed I should think anybody not a—*not* a salamander, would prefer to do so during this present state of the weather; so if you and Mr. Neville should go out together for a walk *this* evening, it would be a natural circumstance, and excite

no suspicion. If you are not tired, reverend sir,—for if you are, I beg to withdraw my idea before having given it utterance—you might like to walk with him.”

“I am not in the least tired, and am quite at your disposal, particularly as I think I see what you are leading up to.”

“I am leading up to it, no doubt, crookedly enough, having nothing straight about me from my nose to my legs,” said Mr. Grewgious, looking down upon his nether continuations with a sigh for their imperfections, “and I dare say your mind, which is as straight as your body, has taken you ahead of me. But you don’t need to tire yourself out with walking; you may take a cab or a hansom, or hail a passing omnibus, so as to get over as much ground as possible in the course of an hour or two. I take it to be fair in love and war to wear out the enemy.”

“You think he will follow us?”

“I think it highly probable that he may, and that being here in *propria persona*, he will be relying for the time on his satanic self and his own infernal devices, and will, when following, leave the path clear for us. Anyhow, we will wait and see if it happens as I expect, and if so, Miss Rosa may go to her friend.”

Then Rosa and Mr. Grewgious, stealthily watching behind the window curtains, soon saw Mr. Chrisparkle and Neville emerge from the house opposite ; and a few seconds afterwards had the satisfaction of observing them followed by a dark figure, which Rosa tremblingly recognised as that of her terrible lover.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## EDDY'S WIDOW.

HELENA was still standing at the window where she had been watching her brother and Mr. Chrisparkle pass out of Staple Inn together. The bright colour on her dark cheek was a trifle more brilliant than ever, and the light in her lustrous eyes was softened into inexpressible tenderness, before which pride had melted away, when she was startled by the sound of a light footstep, followed by a gentle rap upon the door; and a moment afterwards, Rosa, with a beating heart, stood beside her.

"Rosa, you? How glad I am to see you."

"And I to see you, dear, dear Helena!"

If Mr. Grewgious' short-sighted eyes had been able to penetrate stone walls, he would have seen his glowing prediction verified, for the two girls fell into one another's arms, and laid their soft cheeks lovingly together.

"But how is it, dear," continued Helena! "that you are able to come to me? Is the danger over? May we meet again, freely and unrestrainedly?"

“Did not Mr. Chrisparkle say I was coming?” asked Rosa, answering her friend’s questions with another.

“No; he only said he had come to fetch Neville for a walk. I was glad for him to go, for he has been working so hard to-day, poor fellow! although it is so hot; and Neville forgets all his weariness when he sees his kind friend.”

It seemed as if the sight did the same good office for Helena, for her haughty lips were parted to a happy smile, and all vestige of care and trouble had vanished from her face.

“I am come to stay a while, if you will have me,” said Rosa, taking off her hat, and pushing back her clustering hair, “for I want to have a good, long talk with you. I *have* missed you, Helena.”

“If I will have you, my pet? How can you ask such a question? Why, I have been hungering and thirsting for you. But (looking archly at her friend) I’m afraid Mr. Tartar won’t be pleased with the change.”

“Oh, Mr. Tartar!” said Rosa, tossing her head, and pushing out her rosy lips. “What do I care about Mr. Tartar!” But the next moment, to Helena’s great surprise, the pouting lips began to tremble, the dark eyes filled with tears, and, throwing her arms round

her friend's neck, Rosa burst into a fit of passionate crying, sobbing like a child.

Helena drew the pretty head to her bosom, and gently stroked the soft, clustering curls ; but she made no other attempt to soothe her for a while ; until Rosa's sobs grew so violent and her delicate frame shook and trembled so alarmingly, that she became quite frightened.

" Rosa, you will make yourself ill," she whispered. " Try to compose yourself, my darling, and tell me all about it. What can have happened to grieve you so terribly ? "

Holding the childish form closer to her bosom, Helena wiped the streaming eyes, kissed the convulsed mouth, and caressed the hot cheeks, until at length, the sobs subsided.

" Tell me what it is, my child."

" Oh, I will, I will," sobbed Rosa, raising her tear-stained face, and overflowing eyes, and meeting Helena's look of love and sympathy. " I came to tell you, dear. I cannot bear it alone any longer, or my heart will break. And you will help me, Helena, you are so brave and strong, you will help me to do what is right ? "

Helena's look was sufficient answer, as she smoothed back the tangled hair from Rosa's hot forehead.

" You are so different from me, Helena,"



went on Rosa, struggling to speak without sobbing, "so handsome and so strong. I am sure that if any man ventured, when you did not choose, to look admiringly at you, one haughty glance from your dark eyes, would keep him as effectually at a distance as if a hundred armed men stood between you.

"But as for me," went on Rosa, drawing a deep breath, while two tears coursed slowly down her cheeks, "I am such a foolish, silly little thing; so giddy and so thoughtless, and oh, that I should have to say it, so coquettish and vain, that even when he—that dreadful man—first looked admiringly at me, I did not abhor and detest it, as I did afterwards. At first, Helena—how ashamed I am to say it; how degraded it makes me in my own eyes, and must in yours!—at first, I almost liked it.

"Not that I liked him," continued Rosa, raising her head from Helena's lap, where she had buried it, and pushing out both her hands as if to repel something odious, which was approaching her, "not that I liked him, Helena, for a single moment; but sometimes when Eddy—poor, poor Eddy! used to seem so indifferent to me; or when we were walking together, and he had eyes for every pretty girl who passed, and none for me; or when I

saw how long the time seemed to him in my company, and how glad he often was to say 'good-by; ' then I used to think, in my anger at his neglect, 'ah, you do not care for me; never mind! I know some one, of whom you do not dream in your boyish self-sufficiency and conceit, as a rival, who would go a long way out of his road to catch a glimpse of me; whose heart I can set beating to suffocation when I like; and whose eyes glow, as yours have never glowed, when they meet mine.' Ah, I did not know then, that it was the fire of hell that lighted them!"

Again Rosa hid her burning face in her friend's protecting lap, and again Helena laid a gentle and caressing hand upon her head.

"I tried sometimes," continued Rosa, after a few minutes of silence, "to open Eddy's blinded eyes, poor dear! in my childish way; and show him the real state of things. I was not afraid of his being angry with his uncle; he was far too fond of him for that; but I thought he would care a little more for me, if he saw that another cared so much. I thought he would value me more, if he found out how precious I was in another's eyes. I hoped he might learn to love me then as I wanted to be loved, and as I knew,

young as I was, that a bridegroom ought to love his bride ; a husband, his wife."

Interrupting herself to wipe away a perverse tear, which would fall, and putting her little hand into Helena's to seek support for what she was going to say further, Rosa went on again.

" After a while, however, when I saw how useless was the task I had set myself ; when I saw that Eddy's heart was incapable of being stirred with a warmer feeling for me, or that I was incapable of stirring it, pride and mortification made me desist. Was it not his duty to endeavour to win my love and not mine to win his ! Child as I was, I felt that I had no right to throw myself away, or sue for kind words and kind looks, which it ought to have been his highest happiness to bestow freely. He treated me as a baby, and I behaved as one ; making it, more shame for me, the chief amusement of my life to tease and worry him, and often weeping bitterly afterwards for having done it. Yet though I grew every day more indifferent to him, and scarcely needed to sham indifference any more, I still looked forward to our marriage as inevitable. Many and many a time, thoughtless, giddy little thing though I was, my heart swelled within me, and ached, oh,

so bitterly ! oh, so sadly ! when I thought of the long years which lay before us, when we should be yoked together, and should rebel against the yoke all in vain."

"My poor darling!" said Helena soothingly, "I cannot imagine how any man could help loving you dearly, far less that man who was your betrothed husband."

"And yet I loved him through it all," said Rosa, putting up her hot lips to be kissed and comforted, and struggling hard to subdue the emotion mastering her. "I am so glad now, to think that I did love him to the end, poor boy ! Yet it was better we parted when we did ; far, far better ! And though I am sorry to have grieved him at the last, I am not sorry for that."

"You did what you believed to be right, my child, and that always brings peace, and can leave behind no regret," said Helena.

"Yes," said Rosa, "but that is not all I wanted to tell you. Very soon the admiration my music-master showed became irksome to me ; very soon it became intolerable. I showed it him as plainly as I could, but instead of abandoning, he only redoubled, his attentions, until you know at last how I felt towards him."

"I remember, indeed," said Helena.

“And now,” continued Rosa, drawing still closer to her friend, and glancing round the darkening room with a look of terror, “I have something dreadful to tell you, but only *you*, Helena. I dare not mention it to my guardian, though he is so good and true, and I dare not mention it to Mr. Chrisparkle, though he also is the very soul of honour ; for they are both men, Helena ; but you are a woman, and can feel for and with me, even though I should appear as degraded in your eyes as I am in my own. And, confiding in you, Helena, I do so with the firm and full confidence that you will keep my secret as the grave.”

Helena’s smile and earnest eyes would have satisfied any one ; and Rosa, needing no proof of the trustworthiness of her friend, was more than satisfied.

“Look,” said Rosa, drawing a folded paper from her pocket, and handing it to her friend, “look and read, Helena, and put your arm round me while you do so, for I am almost dead with fright and terror ; and forgive me for burdening you too, for I am sure if I kept it to myself any longer, I must die.”

Clasping her friend with one hand, Helena opened the paper with the other, and, straining her eyes in the gathering twilight to make out the words, read as follows—

“MY BELOVED.—You have fled before me, and think, dear, foolish one! that I could let you go. Know that there is not a spot on earth where I would not follow you, that there is no crack or cranny in the wide universe where the fury and intensity of my passion would not enable me to find you out. In the remotest and most secluded corner of this great city, on the trackless paths of the ocean, I would haunt you with my presence, and—to cherish you as the apple of my eye—would hunt you down. I have been near you a hundred times when you have deemed me far away; I shall be near you a hundred times, when you have no visible token of my presence. I have revelled in the exquisite charm of your lovely face, gloated over your beautiful form, and pressed my burning lips to yours in thought, a thousand times, and no flush on your face, no look of fear or of delight has shown me that you felt it. Is spirit so clogged by matter as to be unable to testify itself unsupported? Is the passion which consumes my heart utterly powerless to kindle a sympathetic spark in yours? It cannot be so; but if it were, even then you must be mine. You shall never—I swear it to you—you shall never belong to another. The blow I spoke of would have fallen ere

now, but that I have seen other eyes looking with admiration at your beauty, but that I have seen another face glow when your sweet voice fell upon his ear.

“Beware, my goddess ! angel of my life ! star of my existence ! beware, beware ! Can you wonder that any and every man who contemplates your beauty, that any and every man who basks in the light of your countenance, must become my hated rival—my deadliest enemy, for your sake. By this token, my beloved, that even as you read I am watching you, take warning and give heed to what I say ; for I swear to you again, by Heaven and Hell, that, dead or living, you shall belong to no man but me. I do not charge you to show this to no one, you will be wise enough, I trust, beloved, to refrain from doing so, for your own sweet sake.”

Here the letter abruptly closed, without signature, and as Helena laid it down, having painfully made it out in the fading daylight, a darkness, which might have emanated from the wicked words, or from the dark soul of the writer, crept into the room and shrouded the trembling girls, closely clasped in each other's embrace.

Yes, trembling both ; for even Helena's

brave heart beat loud and fast against that of her terrified little friend.

At last Rosa spoke again.

“I have had that letter two or three days,” she said. “Long enough to form a resolution which even before then had been taking shape and gathering in my brain. For,” she continued, in great agitation, “there is some truth in what that awful man has written. Oh, Helena, you have not yet repulsed me; you will do so, perhaps, now, when I tell you that in my foolish, fickle heart a new fancy, a new predilection, had sprung up and had grown so rapidly that, but that I have plucked it up by the roots, and cast it forth to wither and to die, it might have become love.”

“Is love a crime?” cried Helena, passionately. “Is a predilection a sin? Then God have mercy on us poor women all, for we have need of it.”

“And I have made up my mind,” said Rosa, with a look of surprise at her friend’s sudden energy, “to remain all my life as I should have remained if I had married Eddy, and he had died—his widow. Do not laugh at me, dear; it is a foolish way of putting it, I know. But it may satisfy the dead, perhaps,” said Rosa shuddering, “and it may appease



that dreadful man. At any rate, only I then should have to suffer from his wrath."

"Satisfy the dead!" exclaimed Helena.  
"What new terror haunts you, dearest?"

"I have dreamt so often of Eddy lately," answered Rosa, in a low, frightened voice, and shrinking with terror from the darkness. "I used to dream of him in Cloisterham, after he was lost, but never unhappily or painfully. I fancied myself walking with him in the Close, or by the river, as we used to do; but we never quarrelled, as we so often had done in reality. He was kind and gentle, and loving, as he had been the last, last time. When I awoke then in the morning, my pillow was wet with tears, but they had been happy ones."

"But now," continued Rosa, "my dreams are quite different. I think I am sleeping in my little bedroom, just as I am really, and that Eddy is standing by my bedside. He does not look as Eddy used to look, but rather as the ghost of Eddy might look, if it could appear to me. I do not know why I am sure that it is he, but I *am* sure; I feel it in my inmost heart. He never speaks a word, but looks at me steadily and sadly. I try to cry out, but my tongue is lamed, and I can only make a feeble motion with my hand.

Then he vanishes ; and in vanishing I see his face contract with an anguish so terrible, with a sadness so bitter and intense, that I wake with the fright, shaking in every limb, and bathed in perspiration."

"Your nerves are terribly excited," said Helena, "and the dullness of your life here wears upon your constitution, and will seriously affect your health. You must have a change, dear one, and the dreams will vanish too."

"That is not all," continued Rosa. "This very evening, as I was entering Staple Inn with Mr. Chrisparkle, we met a man coming out. I was thinking of my dream, it is true, and perhaps that may have made me partly fancy it, but as the man looked at me in passing, I saw his face grow pallid with suffering, and contract with the anguish which contracts Eddy's in my dream."

"My darling, you seriously alarm me," said Helena. "At any rate, we must speak to Mr. Grewgious about *this* ; you must have a change of scene immediately."

"I am going to have a change," explained Rosa. "I am going to Brighton with Miss Twinkleton, and then I am going to stay with Mrs. Chrisparkles for the present."

With a start, and a sharp exclamation, only

half uttered, Helena for one moment let fall the arms encircling Rosa's waist, and stepped back—only for one moment; the next she drew her almost passionately towards her again, and covered her face with kisses.

"Do you not approve, Helena?" asked Rosa, surprised, trying to see her friend's face in the darkness.

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered Helena, in a voice which she strove to render cheerful, but which, in spite of herself, waxed slow and sad; "you must, you must be happy there."

"Then why do you speak so sadly; what are you sorry for?"

"Oh, I am not sorry, Rosa; I am glad, glad with my whole heart. Believe me, dear, I am indeed. Do not mind my weeping, Rosa; they are tears of joy. What could I wish better for you than that you should live with—them. You will forget your troubles there, and grow contented and happy again. How can it be otherwise; surrounded by friends so generous and high-minded, so large-hearted, and so true."

If joy were the source from which Helena's tears sprang, it was a prolific one indeed; for notwithstanding her strong effort to control herself, they fell thick and heavy. Clenching

her delicate hands, and biting her lips till the blood sprang, she kept back sob or sound, but the barrier which confined her tears had broken down utterly, and they must and would have way. Rosa, terrified, clung to her friend.

"You, crying, Helena," she said, in great distress. "What cruel thing have I said or done to hurt you? I never knew you shed tears, even during all that dreadful time in Cloisterham. I cannot bear it," sobbed Rosa, weeping in sympathy; "you, who are always so fearless and undaunted."

"It is all over now," said Helena, at last, "and will never happen again. I do not know how I could be so foolish, but all of a sudden, here in the darkness (I have had my troubles, too, you know), in the midst of my joy for you, came a feeling of loneliness for myself, deeper and sadder than I ever had before. I felt myself—it was a foolish fancy—cast out, alone and forgotten. Oh, Rosa, you will not forsake me?"

"Forsake you, my best and dearest friend; oh, never, never."

"And now it is time for you to go," continued Helena. "You told me you dared not stay more than an hour. God bless you! God make you happy, darling! He will, He

will, I know. Now, kiss me, and say good-by."

"I don't like to leave you, Helena; my heart aches so. I never thought that you could cry like that. I have been selfish, I fear; I have only been thinking of my own troubles, and forgetting yours. Forgive me, Helena."

Helena bowed her head again, and kissed Rosa tenderly. Poor Rosa's cheek was wet with tears, but Helena's was dry; she had fought out that brief battle with herself, and wept no more—no more!

"I will go downstairs with you," she said, almost hurrying Rosa's departure, but speaking with calm cheerfulness. "There is light on the stairs, and if Mr. Grewgious is not there to receive you, I will take you to him. Come, dear, make haste," she added, as Rosa still lingered; "remember the risk we encounter through delay."

Mr. Grewgious was there, however, and had been there nearly all the time of the interview. Too anxious for the safety of his ward to be able to sit still at home, he had followed her almost immediately, and had since been taking the air in Staple Inn; ambling up and down before the door into which Rosa had disappeared, and varying the

monotony of the occasion by, from time to time, nearly dislocating his neck in the vain attempt to make out the window behind which she might be sitting, or invoking something—not a blessing—on the head of somebody, not particularly named, and shaking thereby, in a most ominous manner, an exceedingly gnarled and knotted fist.

Into his hands, which from threatenings became chivalrous hands on the spot, Helena consigned her trembling charge. Rosa turned her wistful glance towards her friend once more, as if she would read her very thoughts; but Helena's brilliant eyes were clear and calm, and her haughty mouth was gentle with a tender smile.

“Good-by, good-by, dear!”

“Good-by, my pretty one.”

Mr. Grewgious hurried his ward across the road, and vanished with her under the portal of P. J. T. For the last time, before vanishing, Rosa turned her sorrowful and perplexed face, and Helena was still there with the tender smile upon her lips.

It faded, however, as she went slowly upstairs, and not even the ghost of it remained, when, closing the door, she shut out the light, and was alone in the darkness. Covering her face, as if even the darkness were too

light for her, she mechanically seated herself, and for some minutes sat motionless; then spoke aloud—

“Are the struggles which I have made to subdue my proud and fiery nature all in vain, then? Are the bonds with which I thought to confine my passions so frail that the first strain can burst them? Have his gentle teaching and noble example been so thrown away upon me, that the good seed which he has sown, and which I have so often watered in secret with my tears, has sprung up upon soil so shallow, that the first storm wind passing by can tear it away by the roots! No! I will, I will conquer myself; he shall have no reason to blush for his pupil. He shall never guess, nor shall she, the secret which I will bury in my soul fathoms deep. He shall never guess how dear and precious even his footstep on the stairs has become to me; nor how my heart throbs for joy at the mere sound of his voice. The reverent courtesy, the tender gratitude, which he must have read in my every look and tone, I may still show him; but no shadow or faintest token of anything more. I know that no man living, brought into constant and hourly contact with her beauty, her sweet innocence, her loving and lovely nature, can withstand

them. I am equally sure that no woman can be so much with him, as she will be, without learning to appreciate his high qualities, to reverence his noble, self-sacrificing life, finally, to love him as he deserves to be loved. I am willing that they should be united. I would give up for her my hope of happiness, and for him—for him, I would lay down my life.” She was silent again; then fell upon her knees with a bitter cry. “Is love a crime?” she murmured. “Is hopeless, unreturned, silent and self-sacrificing love a sin? Then God be merciful to me, a sinner!”



## CHAPTER IX.

“T’OTHER THREE AND SIXPENCE.”

THE heat of the last few days had terminated in violent thunderstorms, and a chilly, steady rain now falling, cooled the heated pavements of the city. In the country, where the harvest was ripening, farmers and their colleagues looked up anxiously at the darkening sky, but the half-broiled inhabitants of London were thankful for the cooling rain, and only the voice of the constitutional grumbler was raised against the change as yet.

Such a one, corpulent, red-faced and garrulous, a personified John Bull, or rather the Continental impression thereof, of which the aforesaid grumbling is the chief component part, was seated in a crowded omnibus, occupying room for three, harassing those near him with his knees and elbows, and protesting in a loud, rolling and unctuous voice against the unlawfulness and barbarity of compelling human beings, particularly free Englishmen, to be cooped up in a conveyance not half large enough for the number it contained.

Finding himself and his remarks, however, treated with the same cool indifference, the honest grumbler, seizing a button opposite him, not with the intention of fraudulently taking possession of the same, but as a means to compel its owner to listen to him, fell frantically upon the weather.

He was still upon it, abusing it most fearfully, when the guard interposed with—

“’Ere you are, old gentleman,” and deposited that flushed and loquacious individual, without the least ceremony, upon the pavement, soliloquising loudly as the omnibus rattled further, “Wery good riddance that, of wery noisy and bulky rubbish.”

And here it may be remarked, that this class of British subjects, so plainly stamped with the indubitable mark of their nationality that to mistake them is impossible from the Alps to the Andes, are just as pugnacious in asserting the superiority of the mother country abroad, as they are in abusing it at home; that everything they see on the Continent is so inferior to what England can produce, that one wonders what on earth induced them to come so far to see it; that the Alps are babies compared with the giant mountains of Scotland, and that the blue heaven of Italy shines sombre

after the ethereal atmosphere which envelopes London.

The released owner of the button, a man of about thirty-five or forty, glanced back at his late *vis-à-vis* with a smile, half-amused, half-cynical, and then looked round with a sharp and penetrating glance upon the other occupants of the vehicle. It was very full; the place which had been left empty by the stout gentleman having been almost immediately taken possession of, and, at that very moment, a young lady was forcing an entrance, illegally assisted by the guard, in defiance of the announcement that so many, and no more, could be accommodated with seats at the same time.

A sallow individual in a corner, making room for this new-comer with great readiness, squeezing and pressing himself against the wall, was so confounded by meeting full the orbs of the gentleman of the button, that he quickly subsided into his original limits, and suffered the young lady to depart, on arriving at her destination, unshorn.

Rattle, rattle over the stones went the omnibus, stopping now and then to disgorge itself of some of its burden, but always, in its insatiability, filling itself again, and still the gentleman of the button kept his seat; and

when, with a jerk, the vehicle turned and stopped, he was still within, now its only occupant.

Rousing himself out of a reverie into which he had fallen, he descended slowly, and, opening an umbrella with which he had prudently provided himself, proceeded to his destination on foot.

He was in the extreme east; the streets through which he passed were poor and mean, but he trod them with the air of one who knows where he is, and what he means to do, and never faltered, or looked about him for a guide.

At last—he had been walking some distance—he entered a part down by the banks of the muddy river, most miserable and squalid indeed—wretched courts and wretched houses, peopled by still more wretched inmates, visible through the failing window-panes, some of which were open and exposed to the full brunt of the weather, others stopped with foul rags. Here, for the first time, he stood still, doubtfully, and looked round.

There was a little lad in the court in which he had come to a standstill, watching him with bright, attentive eyes. To this child, therefore, the only human being he could see out of doors, he directed his enquiry.

Clothed in rags, which performed their office so indifferently that they disclosed more than they concealed; incrustated with dirt from top to toe; standing as composedly in the driving rain as if it were his natural element—this child was possessed of all the quick intelligence of his class. In answer to the question—

“Can you tell me where a woman of the name of Coombs lives? it must be somewhere hereabouts.”

He replied, far more significantly than any words could have done, by putting an imaginary pipe into his mouth, drawing on it strongly, and then closing his eyes and nodding his head as if sinking into sleep.

“Yes, it is she.”

“I’ll tell you for a bob.”

“Too much,” said his interrogator, with a laugh.

“For a tanner, then. Not a farthin’ less. And there’s nobody else to tell ye here ’cept me.”

This was so indisputable, that the gentleman, without further remonstrance, drew a sixpence from his purse.

“Look alive, then.”

Looking alive, therefore, to the best of his ability, the child led the way, his bare feet pattering on ahead over the wet stones, and

finally halted before the door of a house in a neighbouring court.

“That’s where she lives, and if she ain’t at home, it ain’t my fault, you know.”

Receiving the promised sixpence with a whoop of delight, the child hastily departed, leaving the gentleman to wonder by what law of attraction his rags still clung to his body, for he actually shed none of them on the road.

Then, turning his attention to the dilapidated house and decayed door, he knocked so lustily that it was a wonder he did not utterly demolish it.

No one responding, he knocked again and again, but with the same deficiency as to result; not even a rat, although any number were busy inside and plainly audible, deigned to answer him, and, on trying to lift the latch, he found the door was locked.

“The young wretch knew it, I’ll be bound,” he exclaimed, with some irritation, then looked round the court with that clear and lucid glance which seemed habitual to him.

But he was alone there in the driving rain; even his sharp little guide had totally disappeared.

The time might be about five o’clock in the afternoon, but in the wretched court it was

growing dark already. The rain poured steadily and heavily, with no nonsense about it, and a loathsome and disgusting smell rose from the gutters, crept out of the unwholesome houses, and enveloped the whole place like a devouring pest.

Evidently undecided and uncertain what to do next, the gentleman turned slowly, and went back to the entrance of the court. Considering within himself whether he should enquire at any other of the wretched houses, or repair to a better street and wait at some decent place an hour or two in hopes of the woman returning, he was suddenly roused by some one jostling against him, and by a cracked voice mumbling at his ear. Starting, he looked round, and found himself face to face with a hideous old woman, who was leering at him out of her bleared and watering eyes.

“Was you a lookin’ for any one here, deary?” she enquired. “P’raps I can show you what you want, and you’ll give me a trifle for the trouble, partickler as times is bad, and it’s a hard matter for a poor old soul to scrape together enough to live on, deary; though, Lord knows, ’tis little enough she wants, and t’aint long neither as she’ll want that little.”

"I was looking for a woman of the name of Coombs," he said, regarding her fixedly. "A woman celebrated for mixing opium, and recommended to me on that account; if I am not much mistaken, you are she."

"Lord bless ye, so I am!" retorted the woman, with a chuckle, and trembling from the eagerness with which she spoke. "Lord love ye, sir, 'tis nobody but me. 'Twould a broke my heart not to have come across ye, and so have missed ye, deary. There's people in this court as would a sent ye to Jack Chinaman, as soon as not—sooner than not—just to spite me, deary. They'd a told ye that he knows how to mix it as well as me; but it's a lie, a wicked lie, and they're thieves and liars as says it. I've only been outbuyin' a bit o' wittles, for one must live, must live, deary, and times is bad, times is drefful bad. Come in, come in, and you shall have what you want in a winkin. I'm drenched to the bone and a shakin' with ager; but I'll have it ready for ye, before ye're ready for it, deary. I will, upon my soul."

Trembling with joy at having found a customer, and shaking from cold and wet, the withered fingers of the hag closed impatiently upon a key, which she drew from the pocket of her ragged dress, and she strove to put it



in the lock. Twice, thrice it fell from her palsied hand, until at length her companion, though without any show of impatience, putting her aside, opened the door himself.

Before him he dimly perceived, by the faint and murky light which penetrated from the court outside, a dilapidated and tottering staircase, which his companion hastily motioned him to ascend.

Following close upon his steps, she opened a door at the top, and almost pushing him before her, as if she feared he might yet desert her, if not kept close, they entered a small room together.

The smell outside in the open court had been foul enough, indeed, for noses not accustomed to such odours; but the smell issuing from the room was more loathsome and disgusting still.

Mingling with the scent of unaired beds, and drying, half-washed clothes and foul decay, was another, penetrating, sickly sweet and almost overpowering scent—the smell of opium.

The man drew back involuntarily, but the woman, pushing him still further in, closed and locked the door behind him.

He was a brave man enough, accustomed to all sorts of adventures, and had many a

time seen danger close before him, terrible and threatening, without flinching; here, too, was only one old woman whom in one moment his strong man's arm could render powerless, and yet a strange terror fell upon him, and the loathsome air made him sick and faint.

From the early morning it had been only half-day in the city; in the court outside it was evening; and here it was the dead of night.

He would have opened the door again—for even the air of the court was pure compared to this, but he could see nothing, and, groping with his hands, he only struck against something cold and hard as iron.

“Wait a bit, wait a bit,” said the woman, groping also about as if she were seeking something. “I’ll strike a light, and then I’ll have it ready for ye in next to no time, deary. Celebrated! ha, ha! They knows that, they knows it. There’s a many, a many, deary, who’s gone to the world’s end to seek comfort, and has come to me at last and found it here, by old Mother Coombs, who knows the right mixin’ of it.”

She had lit the candle by this time, and now, seating herself exhausted, coughed and spit till the few scattered teeth in her head,

as if anxious to quit an abode upon which they held such uncertain tenure, shook visibly.

His eyes had, however, in the meantime, grown accustomed to the darkness, and he had dimly made out the principal objects in the room before that. They were not many; a wretched bedstead, against which he had stumbled on entering, a crazy chair or two, a cripple table, supporting itself as best it could against a wall, and a battered easy chair, in which he had seated himself, striving to overcome the giddiness, which threatened to overwhelm him, and almost already feeling the effect of the stupifying opium, so strongly were his olfactory nerves affected by the sickly scent.

He had made out these few details in one sharp, comprehensive glance; so strong was the instinct and the habit of his life, even though his eyes were growing heavy, and a mist rose before his vision as he gazed.

When the woman recovered from her fit of coughing, she turned to view him. Her red and swollen eyelids covered eyes which had learned to scrutinise almost as sharply as his; but there was nothing to excite suspicion in his appearance; his head was bent, and his eyes almost stupidly cast upon the ground.

"Ah, you've found out the right seat, deary," she croaked; "let you alone for that. This ain't a partickler out-and-out court, and this room might be better than it is; but I'll warrant you that there ain't a court in all London as have held so much delight and happiness within it as this, and in another half an hour, deary, you will have tasted the delights of Paradise."

He made no answer, but remained intent upon the floor, and, after eyeing him again for a moment with a satisfied grin, she turned to prepare the pipe for him.

"It's trouble brought you to me, ain't it, deary? It don't need a lynx-eye to make out that, nor to guess at it neither. 'Tis trouble brings the most here, except the Chinamen, and them as has learned it in furrin lands; and maybe it's trouble that's brought them to it too; Lord knows! But what a blessin' to think that they forgets that here, and comes in heaven; so cheap, so cheap, too."

He murmured something that might have been assent or dissent, she knew not which, and still his eyes were cast upon the ground.

"Oh, I've had a many, a many sittin' there before you," she went on. "Gentlemen as had lost their fortunes, and found 'em agin

here, deary ; gentlemen as had been crossed in love, and ladies, too. Ah, you may believe me, or you may not, as you please, but it's the livin' truth, deary—ladies, too."

Raising his head quickly, as if for the first time he had heard what she said, he asked if his pipe were ready.

"In a minnit, in one little minnit, deary. Lord love you, ye'd a had it afore now, but my fingers was numbed with the wet and cold, and are a shakin' still with the thought of having nearly missed ye, deary. Tell us, lovey, was you crossed in love, maybe?"

"No, not that."

"Ah, that's a pity, that is," she muttered, "for in a leetle, leetle half-hour you'd have had her in your arms, deary. Aye, that you would, take my word for it, and *I* ought to know. There's a many who've been crossed in love, who cuts their own throats, or hers ; or dashes out their own brains, or the other's ; or throws themselves into the rushing river, who never need have done it if they'd come to me, for they'd a had her sure and certain, aye, much more sure and certain than their rival, deary."

"You think, then, that the imagination conjures up visions, under the influence of

opium, almost equal to the reality?" he enquired, lifting his head again.

"You speak the truth, deary," she answered, chuckling. "Leave out the almost, and you speaks the truth. Not almost; far, far better than the reality. In the vision you have perfect enjoyment; all, all you wants and wishes for. In the reality, as a gentleman like you knows better than me, there's more than half disappointment—more than half, deary, sometimes all."

"You open up enchanting vistas," he remarked, dreamily. "Make haste, I am impatient."

"And well you may be," she answered, handing him the pipe. "There, take it, take it, and when you've tried it once you'll try it again. 'Tis a taste that always makes ye long for more. Good luck for us, it always makes ye long for more."

Taking the pipe thoughtfully from her hand, he put it to his lips.

The rain poured heavily against the window pane; the ragged curtain fluttered in the draught, myriads of sharp-teethed rats gnawed behind the wainscot, and the withered figure of the hag, resting on the bed—now, as she moved, half hidden in the darkness, now, lit up weirdly by the flickering light—might

have been an evil spirit presiding over the whole.

If the pipe were to open for him the gates of heaven, it seemed as if the road there lay through hell.

The woman regarded him attentively, with a cat-like and stealthy gaze. Making a great pretence of going to sleep upon the bed, and often fearfully racked by her cough, she yet never turned away her scrutinising eyes. The satisfied grin which had sat upon her countenance at first, faded, then vanished quite, and gave place to a malignant scowl.

Rising, she made as if she would approach him, when, ringing through the rising wind and splashing rain outside, came a fearful shriek, succeeded by another, and yet another.

The man, letting his pipe fall, sprang to his feet, and hastily drew something out of the pocket of his coat; his face reddened heavily, and his downcast eye grew, as if by magic, keen and bright. Was it really hell in this accursed place, then, and were those the screams of the condemned?

“What was that?” he asked, shuddering, yet with a sharp, clear ring in his voice, and with a resoluteness as if he would compel an answer. “What was that fearful cry?”

“What was that?” repeated the woman,

who had carefully observed and noted his every gesture, and accompanying her words with a fierce oath ; “ nothin’, nothin’ at all. Only a drunken neighbour a beatin’ of his wife. Go out and interfere between them if you like, and have your own brains knocked out, and hers into the bargain, or at the best beat twice as much when you are done for. What’s that you’ve got in your hand ? ”

The sudden sharpness of the enquiry ; the feeling that she was right, and that interference would be madness ; the confusion consequent on the sense that he had betrayed himself ; and the fear that the work he had come to do might be frustrated on that account, combined to restore the man to a sense of his position. Hastily replacing the something in his pocket, he sat down again.

“ What did you come for ? ” continued the woman, in a fury ; “ what do you mean by a bringin’ weapons, and God knows what else, along with you ? Do you think a poor old soul as earns a honest livin’ is to be looked upon as thieves and robbers ? What did you come here for, a pokin’ and a pryin’ ? You warn’t smokin’, I see that. Oh, deary, deary me ! ”

“ I’m not accustomed to it,” he returned, “ and that’s the truth. Here, you take the



pipe, and smoke it; I will pay for it all the same, and while you are smoking, let me tell you a story."

"Oh, deary, deary me!" complained the woman, falling upon the bed again, and clasping her knees with both hands, while she rocked herself to and fro, as if in bodily agony. "I see he warn't a smokin' of it. I knowed as he hadn't come for no good purpose, when I see that; them as longs for it don't play with it aforehand, but goes at it with all their might and main, as eager as a suckin' babe upon its mother's breast. Oh, deary, deary me!"

"I tell you," he said, "that I came here to do you no harm. I did not come to smoke, that is true, but I came to benefit you, nevertheless. You say the times are hard; a few bright pieces of gold, though hard themselves, will not make them harder."

He saw by the sudden change of expression on her face, and by the glitter in her eye, that his words were beginning to tell; but still she did not change her position, and, continuing to rock herself, complained further—

"To fall upon a poor, lone woman that never did nothing to hurt nobody; that has been able—through knowin' the right receipt

for mixin' of it—to give comfort to hundreds, who found no comfort more—no, not even in the bottle; who earns a honest livin' by a honest trade; and never had nothin' to do, neither with peelers nor with law courts, though she've been hard put to many and many a day. Oh, deary, deary me!”

“Come!” he said, persuasively. “Listen to me! I only came here to tell you a story, and I will pay you for listening to it, every minute that it costs you. If you can supplement my story, which I think you can, I will pay you double, treble. If you cannot, or will not, I will go my way again, as I came; and if you are none the better for my visit, you will assuredly be none the worse.”

Drawing out his purse, to satisfy her that his words were earnest, he took two sovereigns out, and holding it so as to show her plainly that it held many more, continued—

“These two pieces are yours, when you have heard my story. When you have supplemented and, as I hope, completed it, I will place the purse and all its contents in your hand.”

“There's no harm done, I suppose, in hearing of it?” she said, her eyes and mouth actually watering at the sight of the gold. “There's no law, as I knows on, to punish a

poor old soul for listenin' to what is told her. We're hedged all round about with laws—cruel laws for the poor, though easy enough for the rich and powerful as makes 'em, but I reckon there ain't no law at present to prevent my hearin' what ye say, though like enough, they 'ill be makin' of one by-and-by."

"Then take my pipe and smoke it while I speak," he said. "I suspect it will not be too strong for you, though it would very soon have drowned all my faculties—except the faculty of imagination, as you tell me—in oblivion."

"You are right again there, deary," she answered, with a chuckle, recovering her good humour, while she re-lit the pipe, and put it to her mouth. "It's only strong enough to rouse up my faculties, and to make me bright and wakeful, while listening to ye." Then making herself as comfortable as she could, and composing herself to listen, she made a sign to him to begin.

"My story is not long," he commenced, fixing his eyes attentively upon her, "nor is it, perhaps, either peculiar or original. It is the story of two men—uncle and nephew—both young. The uncle, a dark man, of six or seven and twenty; the nephew, almost a boy still, barely twenty."

He saw the pipe tremble in her hand, and that her eyes, dilating, met his as if in a manner fascinated by their gaze, but she spoke no word.

“The nephew, a light-hearted, thoughtless youth; frank, unsuspecting and good natured, is—although so young—betrothed to a beautiful young girl. This betrothal has grown out of the earnest, expressed wish of the parents on both sides—long dead—for the two, boy and girl, are orphans.

“The children, brought up in constant communication with one another, have grown accustomed to this idea, and, though without any strong attachment on either side, are contented in it. The time, which running its rapid course has transformed them into man and woman, brings the period nigh when they will be united for ever.

“The uncle, who, apparently, is deeply attached to his nephew, conceives a violent passion for this girl; it burns inwardly, for he gives no outward sign or token, but it burns fiercely, consuming and devouring his heart. Perhaps to obtain relief from the pain and agony he suffers, he takes to smoking opium.”

Pausing with his searching eyes upon her, he seemed to try to read her very thoughts;

but though her eyes met his again as if drawn there against their will, she showed no other emotion, and uttered no sound, except a kind of crooning comfort and enjoyment of her pipe.

“At this crisis, just before the time fixed for the marriage and when it seems inevitable, the nephew disappears. There is strong reason to suppose he has been murdered, for his watch and chain are found in the river; yet nothing else. The body remains undiscovered.

“The uncle, who accepts this surmise as sure and certain—and indeed it seems the only probable one—and bowed down with grief so intense and terrible that he has wasted away to a mere nothing, has moved heaven and earth to find out and hunt down the murderer. He is moving heaven and earth to find him still.”

The woman laughed; a laugh so harsh and discordant, that, as it rang through the room, even the rats' sharp teeth ceased in terror, and scuttling away behind the wainscot, they abandoned, for a short time, their work of destruction. The rain fell less heavily, but the wind, which had been howling outside, changed its tune, and laughed too, as if a thousand demons peopled it.

“Do you think he will find him?” inquired the narrator, as the echoes her laugh had awakened died away.

“How should I know,” she replied, “what do you come a tellin’ of your stories to me for? What odds do it make to me, whether he find him or not?”

“You remember that I promised to pay you for listening,” he said.

“Yes, I do, deary, indeed I do; I ain’t forgot that. My memory’s goin’ for a many things; its goin’ fast, but I don’t forget that, or I shouldn’t have listened to ye. Go on, if you like, or tell me another story for a change. There’s prettier stories than that; of lovely ladies and lovely princes as comes to court and marry ’em. Tell me another story this time, deary, and let it be a merrier one. Murder’s an ugly thing to talk of in the dark.”

“But you forget,” he replied, “that I promised you much more money, if you could help me to finish my story. It is very incomplete now. The murdered young man is not found; the murderer is undiscovered, and the disconsolate uncle is unappeased. I want my story finished.”

“Do you want it finished here?” she enquired peevishly, “then ask the rats; ask

the wind roarin' outside ; ask anybody you like, but not me. What do I know about it ? ”

“ I told you that the uncle, to soothe the pangs of a hopeless passion, took to smoking opium.”

“ And he did right,” retorted the woman, with sudden energy, “ he did right ! Where else could he go for comfort ! I’d a done it myself. I told you that them as had been crossed in love, could have what they wanted here ; or anywhere else, if there is such a place, where they knows the right mixin’ of it.”

“ And I know more,” continued the man, “ I know that he came here to smoke ; in this very room, probably on that very bed.”

“ He couldn’t a come to nowhere better,” said the woman, indifferently, “ may be you’re right. There’s a many comes and a many goes. I mixes for ’em and they has their wisions, and they knows that opium’s rare, and pays accordin’ ; then they goes ; but they don’t tell me, deary, what their wisions was.”

“ I know also,” pursued the man quietly, always with his searching eyes upon her face, “ that from this court, and this house, an old and feeble woman made a journey—for her, a long journey—to follow this man. I

know that conquering all difficulties which must have lain in her way, she persevered and tracked him to his destination ; that she did this secretly ; and that the object of her chase had no idea that he was followed. I know that notwithstanding her age, and her decrepitude, she made this journey twice. I am sure that a very strong interest in his actions must have influenced her.”

The hag, who, during these last remarks, had been eyeing him with undisguised astonishment, now, letting her pipe fall, got down from her seat as quickly as her trembling limbs would allow her, and taking up the puny light, approached her visitor, and without the least attempt to hide what she was doing, examined his countenance closely and curiously ; then abruptly setting down the candle, she put the unexpected question—

“Do I know ye, deary ?”

“You must be the best judge of that,” he answered.

“There was two,” continued the woman, “as give me three and sixpence ; two, as I never forgits, out of gratitood. One was a handsome youth who told me—’twas last Christmas Eve—that he hadn’t got a sweetheart, and that his name warn’t Ned. He was—for all he told me a lie—the nephew as



is lost ; and t'other three and sixpence, deary, that was you."

He made no attempt to contradict her, and she went on, grinning with delight at her own penetration.

" You was a easy-going chap then, deary, not so brisk as you are now ; your head was snowy white then, and I'm blessed if at this minute, I see in it one white hair ; other people grows older with time, but you has the secret of growing young again, deary. Ha, ha ! give me your secret for mine ; a fair exchange is no robbery ; that would puzzle you, that would. Aye, for all the change that's come over ye, my eyes is sharper than ye thought for, though I was blind at first ; and I knows ye now, and would know ye among a thousand, for t'other three and sixpence, deary."

As he still remained silent, with a hoarse chuckle, she continued—

" Show me the gold again, lovey ; the bright, sparkling gold in your purse ; 'tis chilly and cold, and I'll make up a little fire in the grate, and sitting before it, we'll have a chat again—a cozy, comfortable chat—and you'll give me the purse into my hand, and we'll change places, while I talks and you listens, deary. Don't be afraid, give it to me.

I'll not run away with it. I'll help ye, I will ! I'll tell ye what it'll comfort ye to hear, pretty nigh as well as the pipe, lovey. Ugh, how the wind howls outside, and roars at us down the chimney ! First smoke, and then fire, deary. Never heed what ye hears at the neighbour's, she's accustomed to it, and I reckon she makes more on it, nor it is. I've heerd her screech, that I never thought to see her alive again, but she isn't dead yet, deary, and half of it's sham I don't doubt."

Drawing her chair close to him, the hag began to relate, and he to listen. The fire she had made, burnt up briskly and crackled lustily ; the only lusty thing there ! The rats, reassured, returned to their ravages, and hastened to complete what they had begun ; the wind shrieked in at the window, roared through the court, and shook the wretched tenement, till it trembled to its basis ; the fire burned itself down to ashes ; the fictitious night of the court outside turned to real night, and still the crackled, eager voice of the hag, mumbled at his ear, and still his watchful eyes were turned towards her face.

## CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH DURDLES LOSES CONFIDENCE BOTH IN  
THE DEAD AND IN THE LIVING. .

PONDERING over the instability of human greatness, and with a shadowy and undefined fear haunting the region of his waistcoat—in fact, lying heavy there in company with an undigested dinner, partaken of some hours before—that at the end of the year, now in its autumnal and shortening stage, the burden and dignity of mayorship would fall from his benign shoulders—so fitted to bear them—his Honour turns out of the ancestral home which he adorns, and proceeds, in solitary state and grandeur, to take his constitutional. He is so strictly clerical that there is not a pin's head outwardly to choose between him and his original, and, deeply imbued himself with this fact, he glances in a dignified way, from time to time, around him, to see if others, too, are sufficiently aware of, and appreciate it.

There are very few admirers to be seen; the stragglers who pass him appear tolerably indifferent to his appearance, for, in point of

fact, this state of perfection, which at first obtained for him so large a share of popular attention, having lost the charm of novelty, ceases to attract.

What wonder, then, that Mr. Sapsea's contemplations take the course indicated by his over-burdened stomach, and become morbid, not to say hypochondriacal!

He reflects with a pang, perhaps as severe as any he has ever felt on that account, on the exceeding impropriety—nay, even culpable indifference—on the part of Providence in having provided Mrs. Sapsea, deceased, with a liver so imperfectly constructed, and feels a sort of angry regret when he thinks that if that exemplary female had been better provided for in this respect, she might, at his side, have performed the part of a wonder-struck and ever-present admirer, and, at that very moment, have contributed her mite to the adulation which is so emphatically his due.

This train of thought having been set in motion, Mr. Sapsea, travelling along with it, with his hands behind him, and his chin elevated, as his moral nature, derives even no comfort from the reflection that, in the event of his better-half having been spared to him, that noble epitaph—which has exalted him to

a rank among England's men of letters, which he modestly declines to specify, even to himself—would never have been written. Indeed, the thought, for the moment, adds one drop of bile to that which is surging within him; and, as he makes a mental reckoning of the vast number of great men who, in their day, were far more plentifully bespattered with mud than overwhelmed with thanks, the shadow, which lies heavy on his intellectual brow, deepens into the blackness of night.

A vague suspicion, which certain outward signs and tokens—palpable enough to one less completely armoured in self-esteem than his Honour—have tended to arouse, that, in the eyes of Cloisterham, he has fallen somewhat from his high estate, coupled with a feeling—not of fear as yet, but as nearly like it as one so invulnerable can be supposed to feel—that on some subsequent occasions he had not quite so brilliantly distinguished himself as in the affair of Mr. Landless (when even his enemies and calumniators had been compelled to acknowledge, in spite of themselves, that he had not only shone as a bright particular star, but had displayed a depth of penetration and keenness of intellect almost unparalleled) worms at the Mayor's heart; and—while arousing in him sentiments of in-

dignation and disgust at the blindness and astonishing want of ability to "look up" displayed by these low-minded individuals who, from constant grovelling in the earth, and grubbing up of such rubbish as might be found there, were naturally dazzled and bewildered when their enfeebled organs of vision met the full radiance of the sun in its splendour—might have made, even of him, a misanthrope.

That Mr. Jasper, whom he had favoured so unreservedly with his valuable and improving conversation, should be induced to leave a town where he could enjoy such an inestimable privilege, is a problem which the Mayor will not attempt to solve. His brain reels at the thought, for, unless the young man's intellect has become weakened through his troubles, it is impossible to conceive how any one could be so blind to his own interests. What, though Mr. Jasper had assured him, on the eve of his abrupt and indecorous departure, that only the hope—nay, the certainty—of being better able in London to weave the rope for the murderer's neck, should have induced him to abandon such high privileges! What, though he had emphatically assured him that that dread duty performed, his only wish and longing was to

return to Cloisterham, and to spend the remainder of his days at the foot of the charmer (by which term he, of course, alludes to his Honour). What, though he reminded him that, only through the medium of his (Mr. Sapsea's) powerful intellect and keen-sightedness—where all other men were blind—he had obtained the clue to the mystery, which he held tight, and dared not let go! Not even all these assurances, and many others, can keep up that young man in his esteem. He has gone down fathoms deep, and it seems very improbable that he will ever be fished up again.

“Put not your trust in princes!” murmurs the Mayor, pathetically, as he paces to and fro, “no, nor in choir-masters!”

“What was the reward,” he soliloquizes further, “of a Shakespeare, a Milton, a—a—a great many others? How many long years of comparative obscurity and comparative indigence they had lived through; how many slanderous backbitings and cankerous envies they had been the victims of; how lamentable a deficiency their surrounding fellow-creatures had displayed in respect of looking up to them; and how, even in these latter times, there were fools who would not give the giants their due, but persisted—viewing

them through the medium of their own perverted vision—in regarding them as little more than dwarfs ! What had been *their* fate, might it not also be the destiny of a Sapsea ? ”

This reflection, though, perhaps, not very cheering in the abstract, produces, nevertheless, in the mind of the individual harbouring it, a sort of gentle melancholy, not altogether unpalatable. It is gratifying to feel that he is placed by comparison—although at present only in his own thoughts—on a level with men of such unquestionable note ; and, shaking his head and gold-headed cane together, he heaves a weighty sigh over the envy and petty jealousy of his and their contemporaries.

Feeling considerably relieved, and, indeed, almost cheerful again—for, with the sigh, the vexation seems to pass, and a steady reliance on his own intrinsic merits to take its place—the Mayor steps out briskly, and, ecclesiastical from top to toe, notices, for the first time, that it is a lovely afternoon. The constitutional, too, is doing him good, and the obstinate dinner struggles against its fate no longer. In short, the Mayor feels decidedly better, and, as his stomach has been the proximate cause of his melancholy, so his stomach brings him back to cheerfulness.



“There are calumniators,” he proceeds in thought, more tranquilly, “who would blacken even the Deity Himself, if they could get at Him ; who would taint the memory of Queen Bess, that glorious virgin of high renown, and reduce her to the level of any other improper person ; who would sacrilegiously venture to affirm that this chosen country is by no means so far above all other countries as she is, and was, and ever must be, according to the nature of things ; and who would venture to sully the majesty of the Crown itself with their polluted hands. Pho !” exclaims the Mayor, with righteous indignation, “ ’tis enough to make one blush for mankind.”

Heaving again a heavy sigh, and feeling himself once more greatly relieved thereby, his Honour comes to the natural conclusion that a sight of his fame would go still further towards restoring his ruffled soul to its chronic and natural state, and turns, still slowly and with ponderous steps, towards the churchyard.

The bright sun shines with a clearness peculiar to the time of year ; not hot and scorching as in the early autumn, but soft and bright. The trees in the Close and in the churchyard have put on their brilliant autumn

dress, and show themselves more splendid than in the deep green of summer, as if they would ignore and defy the certain death which is approaching them, and vaunt of the long life in them yet; just as an old belle might endeavour, by gay ribbons and gayer paint, to hide the ravages which the ruthless hand of Time has graven on her face, sporting, in her fading maturity, garments which, for their gaudiness, she would have blushed to don in her bright girlhood, all unneedful of such spurious aid.

Nature laughs with gladness, and, happy in the present, bestows no thought upon the future. What matter that the leaves, which shine so red and golden in the sunshine, are withered and old! Who heeds that, one by one, they drop, to die forgotten!

There is no wind now, only a soft breeze, full of perfume, which caresses the vain-glorious leaves, and whispers of long life and happiness.

Cruel breeze, false as gentle! Like all flatterers, thou speakest a lie, for thou knowest that when the wind shall rise again, when it shall come, mighty from the ocean, fresh from fearful ravages and hoarse with anger, it will seize those dying leaves, and, as if impatient at its own forbearance and delay, will whirl them to destruction.

No such thoughts as these disturb the mind of his Honour, or influence his reflections in the very least; though the breeze—sometimes toying with the leaves, sometimes playing about the Cathedral, flitting in at the open window, and coming out again laden with melody stolen from the rolling organ and the white-robed choristers—occasionally condescends to patronisingly stroke his furrowed cheek.

Far too full of himself and his dignity to have room for any such trivialities, he only quickens his pace involuntarily, in anticipation of the treat awaiting him, and of the complacent admiration for himself which the perusal of the epitaph never fails to awaken; when, to his surprise, he sees that he is anticipated.

Prostrate before the monument of Mrs. Sapsea lies an individual upon his knees. Yes, as the Mayor approaches nearer, he sees that his eyes have not deceived him, but that the man—for man it is—is really in that attitude of devotion.

It is a common working man, no gentleman; but that makes no difference. He has heard, he has read that true genius is ever of a nature to captivate even the unlearned and unsophisticated, and that the greatest tribute

is the tribute paid by the unspoiled instinct of the multitude. And as the man is not "with a blush retiring," he must feel within himself the innate ability to "look up," and be ready and willing so to do.

He fancies he hears a noise resembling rapping; he even arrests his hurried walk for a moment to make sure of this. It sounds like the rap of a hammer. Surely the man is not in a faint, brought on by the intensity of his feelings, and that is his head against the stone.

Quickening his pace again in his impatience to arrive at the scene of action, and burning to present himself to the stranger as the elevated being to be looked up to, Mr. Sapsea approaches the monument and comes close up to the man who, absorbed in his own occupation, or his own thoughts, whichever it may be, neither looks round nor seems to heed him.

The Mayor, panting, is about to speak, and pauses again to recover breath to enable him to do so, when the man, rising suddenly and turning round, discloses the face and figure of Durdles.

Durdles, begrimed and dusty, with a short, dirty pipe, brown from constant use, in the corner of his mouth; a hammer in one hand,

and his never-failing dinner bundle—though he has long dined—in the other.

Durdles, in whose dull eyes not one spark of admiration, or a gleam of anything but sodden tipsiness shows. Durdles, grave and imperturbable as ever; attired in his well-known flannel coat, and decorated with bits of stone and decayed leaves and earth from the grass upon which he has been lying, and which cling to him still, as if quite as much at home there as in their native element, and not even making the slightest attempt at greeting, or giving sign or token of any respect for his Honour, the Mayor.

*This* the impassioned worshipper before the tomb? Impossible! Mr. Sapsea, not being a man of rapid perception, and usually coming to his conclusions with a slowness proverbial, when not assisted—his mental faculties requiring, like his gastric juices, time to digest—remains open-mouthed and panting, staring at Durdles as if he were an apparition; and Durdles, utterly unabashed, and puffing at his pipe with great relish, returns the compliment most liberally, and stares with his dull eyes steadily back at him.

“Why, it’s only you,” stammers his Honour at last.

“And who should it be, if not Durdles?”

replies that worthy, regarding the Mayor with a by no means propitiatory glance, and removing his short pipe from between his teeth, to spit upon the grass. "Who comes a visiting of 'em except Durdles? Why, 'tis me that might ha asked the question, and been doubtful of the answer, too, for I'm blest, I am (spitting again), if I didn't think you was your better half."

Mr. Sapsea, with the revulsion from high expectation to the bitterest disappointment strong upon him, draws back haughtily, and, with dignified displeasure in every feature of his expressive countenance, enquires whether Durdles knows to whom he is speaking? And further remarks, receiving only a puff of very indifferent smoke in answer, that Durdles had better go home and sleep off his intoxication, or he will run a chance of making his (the Mayor's) acquaintance in a manner less agreeable to his feelings, and on a footing (so the Mayor elegantly puts it) much more in accordance with their several positions in society.

Durdles rarely laughs; but he laughs a hoarse laugh now; and, finding his pipe interfere with the heartiness thereof, takes it out again, accordingly.

His Honour, still preserving the same dig-

nified demeanour, and feeling that his last words must prove—reflected on—a total quencher for Durdles, and send him home abashed and penitent, repeats his former advice, and—with that innate sagacity which is one of his high attributes, and which points out to him unerringly where to begin and when to stop—prudently withdraws from any further discussion, and ponderously turns upon his heel.

He feels annoyed that his expected enjoyment has, as it were, been snatched away from before his very nose, and disappointed to find his almost certain hopes of appreciation so cruelly turned to naught; but, recovering his serenity, comforts himself with the reflection that true genius is unextinguishable, and if the time of victory be not to-day it must be to-morrow.

He has only proceeded a few steps in his retrograde course, his motion in walking being as dignified and slow as everything else about him, when he is startled by a loud call from Durdles.

“Halloa there! Halloa, Mr. Sapsea!”

Still proceeding, though at a still slower pace, the Mayor, nevertheless, debates within himself as to whether he shall pay attention to the summons or not. The displeasure

which he feels it incumbent on himself to show—Durdles' behaviour having been as disrespectful as strange—struggles with the wish to know what the stonemason had been doing there ; what he meant by that strange allusion to his other half ; (Mr. Sapsea declines, even to himself, to speak of her as his "better" one) and to his visiting them !

"Besides," concludes the Mayor, in his soliloquy, "who knows but the man may have repented of his incivility and may be wishful to obtain my pardon."

His last supposition seems somewhat unlikely, and not in the least to coincide with his previous knowledge of Durdles ; but, the balance in his mind inclining already strongly in favour of his curiosity, he puts that in to make it weigh the heavier.

Looking about him to see if any one is within sight or hearing, and reassuring himself as to there being no one to bear witness to his extraordinary condescension—the choristers, the officiating clergymen, and the small congregation having dispersed already, and Mr. Tope, the last to leave after having locked up, disappearing with his back towards the Mayor—his Honour turns again, and motions with his gold-headed walking stick that Durdles is at liberty to approach.



But the stonemason, being a churlish and tough dispositioned individual, and, moreover, one whose organ of veneration it would have puzzled a phrenologist to discover, it having apparently been left out in the structure of his skull, only responds to his Honour's invitation by a corresponding one on his part, and points with his short pipe towards the epitaph.

Even Mr. Sapsea, slow as he is usually to divine, is so far acquainted with the character of the man with whom he has to deal, as to feel sure that to attain his point he must be the one to move, and he, therefore, with exceeding dignity, and supporting himself with the fact that nobody is there to see him, advances towards the spot so distinguished by his talent; but his progress being remarkably easy, his curiosity carrying him two steps forward, while the sense of the enormous impropriety of a man like himself, the talented composer of the epitaph, the Honourable the Mayor of Cloisterham, being, as it were, at the beck and call of a drunken sot like Durdles, invariably sending him, for the two gained, one in arrear,—Durdles is reduced again to beckoning, and to beckoning imperatively before the Mayor stands by his side.

“What on airth made you cut off like that?” inquires Durdles, grimly, his pipe in the corner of his mouth, and his speech, naturally gruff, thicker and more indistinct than usual from having so small a space allowed it for its passage. “Durdles ain’t got no time for gallawanting about, and you can spare him the trouble, which he must otherwise have took, of coming up to your house.”

“Have you anything to tell me?” asks the Mayor, as pleasantly as circumstances allow of.

“When the day’s fine,” continues the stonemason, without troubling himself to answer the question more directly, “and Durdles have got a ten-minute to spare, which ain’t often, through being mostly overrun with work, and not a bit overrun with time to do it in, Durdles comes out to wisit ’em. Not having wisited Mrs. Sapsea for a long time, a year a’most, and having a notion to find out how things is going on down there—indicating the tomb—with that old ’ooman, and having fust cleaned himself, as is the proper thing to do when a genelman is going to call upon a lady, Durdles sets out to do it.”

Mr. Sapsea gulps down the feelings which are naturally aroused within him on hearing

Mrs. Sapsea, deceased—who would have been a sort of Lady Mayoress, if her liver had supported her to that epoch—spoken of so disrespectfully as an “old woman,” sagaciously considering that any expression thereof would probably check the explanation, upon which Durdles has now entered in earnest, and feeling, in spite of this incomprehensible beginning, a strong curiosity to hear the end. He composes himself, therefore, into a favourite attitude of the Dean’s—which from frequent practice he copies to perfection—in order to listen with better effect; and succeeds so completely in becoming, as it were, the Double of that Divine, that but for his back being somewhat broader—a mistake of Nature’s, for which he is not accountable—any stray passer-by must feel sure that the face hidden from his scrutiny is that of his Reverence himself.

“Well!” continues Durdles, drawing strongly on his pipe, and puffing the smoke with perfect indifference in the very face of his Honour, “I takes my hammer, which is house-bell and front-door knocker, when I visits them, and I raps and raps, and raps and raps again, and leaves off rapping, and stare and poke my fingers into my ears, which seem all of a sudden to be stopped up with

cotton-wool, and raps once more, but—” (dropping his voice sepulchrally, and drawing out his pipe to shake it solemnly and emphatically before Mr. Sapsea’s nose) “there was no voice, nor any that answered.”

“Why, what could answer, Durdles? You are drunk, or foolish!” These words rise to the Mayor’s mouth, but fortunately he has presence of mind enough to close his lips, and keep them there: his usual slowness of delivery coming to his aid has prevented their escaping too fast for recall. So he only composes himself into an attitude, if possible, more Dean-like still, and, with his hands resting on his gold-headed cane, waits for the light which will enable him to fathom this chaos.

“Again I raps,” says Durdles, who has been occupying himself in re-filling and re-lighting his pipe, and who now has it between his teeth again, “but it warn’t of no use; there wern’t no cotton-wool in Durdles’ ears. They was as clear as Natur made ’em, and as empty of any thing or body to obstruct ’em, as is Mrs. Sapsea’s tomb.”

Uttering these dread words in a voice more sepulchral than ever, and accompanying them with a solemn, warning action towards the Mayor, Durdles raises his dull eyes as if he would request him to explain the mystery, if

he can. But his Honour, who comprehends as much, or as little, of what Durdles is talking about, as a new-born babe might be supposed to do, only feebly relaxes in his clerical position, and becomes his natural self again from pure excess of astonishment.

“Instead o’ answering,” continues the stonemason, mournfully, as the Mayor remains speechless, puffing at the monument this time as if he wishes to blot it out from his sight on account of its unworthiness, and shaking his head and hammer at it in strong disapproval, “instead o’ answering to the perlite hinqury of Durdles, ‘Well, mum, and how are you gitting on down there?’ with: ‘Pretty well, pretty well, Durdles, thankin’ you kindly for the haskin’; as well as can be expected within the narrow limits of my ’abitation, and the consekent closeness of the hatmosphere,’ that perverse female, contrary to the well-known ’abits of her sex, remains as silent—as silent as the grave.”

Considering the expectations which the stonemason appears to have formed with regard to a voice from the silent tomb, this simile does not seem as appropriate from his lips as it might be from those of another; but he delivers it with great earnestness, shaking again his head and hammer at the monument.

A dreadful idea comes into the mind of the bewildered Mayor—more rapidly than ideas were wont to come to him, and perhaps engendered by his terror—that Durdles is neither drunk nor foolish, but downright, stark, raving mad. He remembers what a strange character the man has always borne; his weird love of lingering among the dead; his haunting of the Cathedral at all hours of the night and day; his familiarity with the “old uns;” and then this dreadful imagination that even the dead in their graves could hold converse with him. No, there is no mistake about it! His idea becomes a certainty; the man is a raving lunatic, and he—Mr. Sapsea, Mayor of Cloisterham, talented rising author—he would be his victim and his prey.

Anguish unutterable seizes upon every faculty of his Honour, and weighing him down as with iron weights, lames even his very thoughts. The cold sweat of terror rises to his brow, and his limbs tremble under him. Glancing round feebly to see if human aid be near, he remembers that only a few minutes before he had been thankful to see the place deserted, and the thought of this, and of his cozy dining-room at home, where probably at that very moment his house-

keeper is looking out for him and wondering at his delay, almost force a groan to his lips, the utterance of which might be fatal.

To fly is impossible, his feet are rooted to the ground, and his parched tongue, cleaving to the roof of his mouth, forbids his uttering a cry : though perhaps that is a blessing, for it would, no doubt, bring down upon him, instantaneously, the threatened danger, which only the utmost exercise of his self-command may enable him to avert.

Necessity is said to be the mother of invention, and something of the force of this proverb rises to the distracted mind of his Honour. Striving to collect his scattered faculties which, on the first alarm, had fled far and wide, he presses his trembling hand to his bewildered brow, and endeavours to bring his mind to bear upon the case.

He has heard somewhere that lunatics may be tamed by the power of the eye : just as an angry bull may be arrested in its headlong course by the same means. He remembers how often he has been assured by his admirers that his eye is of that cast and quality eminently adapted to inspire awe in the human breast ; he has proved it very efficient on all such opportunities as enforced auctions, the mere casual glance thereof reducing the en-

forced one to a low level indeed ; and in discharging the duties of his mayoralty, he has frequently noticed offenders, particularly those brought before him for trivial faults, much confused thereby. It is his only chance ; another distracted glance around shows him that no one is in sight, and he must try it on Durdles. Fixing his eyes therefore on that worthy's back, for the stonemason is still puffing at the monument, the Mayor endeavours to call into them a sternness and authority which may prove effectual to quell any outbreak of fury on the part of the madman, and cautiously draws back a step.

Durdles turning round suddenly, Mr. Sapsea remains motionless, and growing absolutely white with terror, and losing all sense of sight from the mist which rises before his eyes, he smiles so ghastly a smile, in hopes of appearing unconscious, that even Durdles must have been impressed with it, but that he has surrounded himself with a fog of his own making, and moreover is so completely absorbed in something else. At this juncture, Mr. Sapsea becomes so surpassingly unclerical, bearing much more resemblance to a sheep before the wolf than to the shepherd of a flock, that even his most intimate acquaintance passing by might have denied all knowledge of the man.



“Is that the Cathedral?” inquires Durdles, breaking the silence at last, and pointing solemnly towards the building, which rises sombre and massive against the evening sky, now turning bright red and golden with the setting sun. “Is that our Cathedral, Mr. Sapsea?”

The Mayor opines that it is. He would have opined the same if Durdles had enquired whether it were the Tower of London, being for the present only capable of a monosyllabic assent or dissent, and having a dim recollection that one must coincide with all a madman asserts, however ridiculous and opposed to common sense the assertion may be; but his Honour’s voice quavers as he speaks, and his Honour’s robust frame shrinks together, till he appears not much more than half his usual size.

“Air you,” enquires Durdles further, “Mr. Sapsea, auctioneer, and till another’s chose, Mayor of this town? or air you not?”

Mr. Sapsea is quite too far gone, to even notice that little prick “till another’s chose,” but shrinking more and more, he again answers that he is; just as he would have made the same response had Durdles inquired if he were the hangman of the giant city before alluded to.

“Is that the crypt?” continues Durdles,

indicating it with his hand, "Is that the refuge to which Durdles has had recourse, when attacked by them young wretches of boys, and having had a drop go to his head, which comes easy, Durdles not being accustomed to it?"

Again the Mayor assents, striving with a sort of crab-like motion to get further from the object of his terror; for, judging from these remarkable questions, the dreaded outbreak must be near at hand.

"Is them the monniments?" asks Durdles again, waving his pipe towards them, and shaking out the ashes, before transferring it to his pocket. "Is them the monniments as I've reared myself, or does my eyes deceive me?"

The Mayor remarks that if there is any faith in eyes then those of Durdles are to be relied on; and adduces his own in corroboration, if any is needed, of the fact.

"Am I awake, and in my right mind?" pursues the stonemason, whose madness seems to be of a questioning order, and to be disclosing itself in an interrogative vein, "or am I a having wisions? if the former, will you, Mr. Sapsea, have the goodness to step on Durdles' toes, so as to convince him of the fact?"

The Mayor, with a natural reluctance to come into such close quarters with the stonemason, and entirely convinced in his inmost mind that he is not only under the delusion of visions, but that these visions are replete with danger for his fellow man, cannot resist the impulse to retreat, and with a repetition of his crab-like motion, puts another inch of ground between them ; the while he earnestly assures him, that if ever man was alive and kicking and in full possession of his waking faculties, that man is Durdles ; appearing however, by a groan which he prudently stifles at the birth, to wish that such were not the case.

“ You think,” says Durdles, solemnly, with his right hand upon the monument, that monument which was the pride of Mr. Sapsea’s heart, and the perusal of which had been a blessed means of improvement to so many, “ you think that your better-half, deceased, lies under that there stone ? ”

The Mayor has ventured to think so—he has really been under that impression ; but stands quite open—oh, remarkably open—to correction. Why, if Durdles thinks differently, then the Mayor thinks differently too. Who should know better than a man so often among them ; who even enjoys the privilege,

so rare, of holding communication with them ; who is acquainted, no doubt, with everything that concerns them ? Who should know, if not Durdles ?

Durdles receiving this answer, with a sort of satisfied grunt, implying that without any further ado that is the embodiment of his sentiments, the Mayor, emboldened, continues—

“Perhaps Durdles will show him the honour of accompanying him to his house ; the sun is setting, and it is shivery.” His Honour shivers so excessively as he speaks, that it is plain he feels it so. Durdles, too, as he gently reminds him, has been lying on the grass, damp no doubt, indeed the Mayor believes it had rained in the morning, although he speaks always open to correction, and a glass of his, Mr. Sapsea’s port, excellent port, though he says it himself, or a couple of glasses, would warm Durdles—would go, as the phrase is, straight to Durdles’ heart. The conversation they are holding, of so deep and thrilling an interest, so touchingly connected with the “reverential” deceased, may perhaps be continued on the road, or better still, in Mr. Sapsea’s dining-room : that is to say, if Durdles’ thinks so, otherwise the Mayor stands ever

open to correction, and Durdles' wishes are his wishes too.

Perhaps some sodden and dull impression comes into Durdles' brain, that Mr. Sapsea, quite in opposition to his custom, is uncommonly complaisant and yielding; but the honest stonemason is incapable of feeling much surprise, and all the faculty which he possesses for that emotion is absorbed in that something else. The prospect, however, of a couple of glasses of good wine is not a prospect to turn one's back upon, and Durdles, signifying the same, and turning his face towards it, accordingly, slouches out of the churchyard by the side of his Honour, prepared to accompany him to his house.

"As I was a saying," continues Durdles, confidentially, with his mouth close to the Mayor's ear, causing the blood of that dignitary to run cold in his veins, "you think that Mrs. Sapsea lies in that there silent tomb, where she was laid, and where she ought to lie. Durdles thought so, and yet I tell ye now, and Durdles knows what he's a talking about, that she aint there no more than you nor me."

Mr. Sapsea, staggering rather than walking, ventures on never a word.

"'Tis the most extraordinary thing that ever

happened," begins Durdles again, stopping short in his earnestness, and fixing his dull eyes on his companion who has stopped too, from utter want of ability to proceed, "and even Durdles can't make head or tail of it. I tell ye that that there female, who ought in the nature of things to be lying quiet and comfortable where she was buried, has vanished."

"Vanished!" repeats the Major mechanically, not in the least knowing what he is saying, and only repeating the stonemason's words, with the blind instinct of its being always necessary to assent, "vanished!"

"Clean!" concludes Durdles briefly, slouching on again, with the Mayor staggering at his side. "Oh, why is the Close so deserted; no human help at hand!" Durdles sunk in reverie, probably pondering over the circumstance which has excited so much wonder, even in *his* mind, speaks no more for the present. At last they have crossed the Close, never surely so slowly before, and turn in under the gateway, over which John Jasper had formerly resided, and which is now tenanted by his successor.

As they catch sight of the busy High Street, as they hear the hum of voices, more distinct every moment, Mr. Sapsea's manner changes,

and Mr. Sapsea's lost dignity and lost courage come back to him, as if by magic. Drawing himself up to his usual height, and becoming immediately several inches taller than he had been a moment before, and almost Dean-like again, the Mayor turns his head and contemplates his unconscious companion. Durdles is slouching along so quietly, so exactly his usual self, except for a more than ordinary contemplative expression, that even the Mayor feels that to call for help would be absurd, and might expose him—horrible thought—to public ridicule. He must therefore seek to get rid of Durdles quietly, and without sensation, and indeed, viewed under these altered circumstances, the stonemason appears so harmless, that he begins to fear that the tremendous terror which he had allowed to master him has been roused by phantoms of his own creation, which have had no existence in fact—Durdles being unquestionably more silly than mad; and an uncomfortable suspicion rises to his brain, and will not be kept down, that he has been nearly making a fool of himself. Nearly; not quite, thank God! No one, ah, how fortunate—for the third time, the Mayor's views change regarding this circumstance, showing how even the wisest man may err—how fortunate that no one

was there to see or hear him ! Only Durdles, and here in the populated High Street, before his very own door, he feels confident of his ability to put Durdles down and to turn the tables completely against that individual.

With a flush of anger mantling on his classical brow ; a sharpness of accent, betokening no good to Durdles ; and a totally different manner, he addresses himself to the stonemason who, coming out of his reverie, and catching sight of the beautiful little effigy of Mr. Sapsea's paternal ancestor, which seems to wink a jovial welcome, begins to indulge in lively expectation of the glass of port, that is to go, as Mr. Sapsea promised, straight to his heart.

“ You are drunk, Durdles, as I told you before ; quite indecently intoxicated. I am ashamed of you ; I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it myself. No one,” pursues the Mayor, sternly, “ no one should have persuaded me. You have been talking the most execrable nonsense ; fortunately for you, only I, who am indulgent, was there to hear you. You are thinking nonsense, Durdles, greater still. (For any one else, Durdles's physiognomy would have expressed utter vacancy, for this sudden turn again on the part of the Mayor, bewilders



even his imperturbable soul; but Mr. Sapsea's sagacity, not being of a common order, penetrates the vacant exterior, and sounding far below the surface, finds there what he fears.) "You have been fancying, I see it in your face, that you had frightened me. Ha, ha, the thought tickles me! You would have to have been born, Durdles, a long time before you were to do that. The man you see before you," continues the Mayor, pompously, puffing himself out like a turkey-cock, the high colour of indignation on his cheek increasing his resemblance to that pugnacious bird, "is a man, Durdles, humbly, yet fully conscious of his social position; impregnated with the belief that the Almighty has graciously endowed him with gifts superior to the common herd; grateful for his high station, as an Englishman of mark, which, in contradiction to all foreigners—imbecile lot!—forbids him to feel fear. Therefore you comprehend, Durdles, that your fancy is ridiculous and groundless, and all I can add is a request, nay a command, to go home and sleep off your intoxication, or I shall be compelled to have you taken somewhere else, which I should be sorry to do, for old—a—patronage sake."

Durdles, in an excess of bewilderment, and

with an impression on him again, that he must be the victim of "visions," lifts first one heavy hand to his head, to feel if he is really himself, or some one else; then putting down his dinner bundle, examines his arms with close attention, stroking them from shoulder to elbow, and from elbow to wrist, and pinching them, to feel that he *can* feel, and to make quite sure that these members are his own, and not the property of another; then shuts his eyes closely, opening them wide again after an interval, to convince himself that they are in good order, and not deceiving him; and finally, in an imbecile manner, murmurs something about "strong old port."

"Not a drop," continues Mr. Sapsea, who even yet is undecided as to the mental condition of the stonemason, and who wouldn't have admitted him into his house on any account; "not a drop! Would you have the chief magistrate of this city connive at drunkenness? Would you wish—a spectacle for Cloisterham!—to be carried out of the Mayor's house in a state of total intoxication? Come again when you are sober; but heed my words, and make off for to-day, or it will be worse for you."

"No, heed my words!" exclaims Durdles, who seems to have satisfied himself as to his

identity, raising his hand solemnly, and shaking it with awful gravity straight at the effigy, "heed my words, you, Mr. Sapsea in the flesh; and you, Mr. Sapsea in the flesh no more, but carved in wood, more nat'ral still; I tell ye both, with Cloisterham a hearing of me, and a bearing witness to what I say, that Mrs. Sapsea, now dead nigh upon two year, has arose from her grave, and is, as likely as not, a walking this here earth of ours. I tell ye, that its solemn truth that her coffin's empty, and that she has vanished. I tell ye, that she may be a waiting for ye in that very house there. Go in and be comfortable, if ye can, with the dead at yer side. If ye doubts Durdles' words, then have the vault entered and the coffin opened, and ye'll prove them true. Have the coffin opened and then say if Durdles knows what he's a talking about. I renounces ye and all your works. There's an old saying 'that murdered men can't rest in their graves.' Murdered women, as is nat'ral in the sex, may be more restless still. There's folks in Cloisterham as says, for all you are Mayor, that you, in a sort of way, *did* for your wife, by a forcin' that poor female, as was weak in the back and of a sickly constitootion, to break it, lookin' up to ye!"

As Durdles pauses, apparently to gain breath, for he has spoken in an unusually high key, the discomfited Mayor perceives that a small crowd has collected round them, attracted by the loud voice of Durdles.

It is principally composed of ragged and dirty boys, who are always at hand when anything occurs which may afford them amusement.

Conspicuous among them all, and to be singled out at any moment, as the boldest, filthiest, and most imp-like of the lot is Deputy; his mouth and eyes wide open, and an almost fiendlike expression of keen comprehension and intelligence upon his face which, though that of a child in years, it would be blasphemy to call childlike.

His Honour, who has become remarkably limp again, even on the threshold of his house, and with help at his elbow, ejaculates something which sounds like "Dust to dust," and the reducing influence of feeble action of liver.

"Dust to dust," repeats Durdles, with supreme contempt, "under that there moniment; much you knows about it; she couldn't do it if she tried. The common folk under grass and in coffins as falls to pieces afore they're under the earth a'most, couldn't do it.

either in the time, even if they had the audacity to want to. It don't matter to Durdles. It aint his bed-curtains as she'll be a holding back in the dead of night. It aint Durdles as she'll be a haunting of. I renounces ye and all your works !”

With a wave of his hand, first towards the Mayor and then towards the effigy which has appeared, slightly bending forward, to listen with the deepest interest, Durdles slowly slouches away, followed by the boys, led by Deputy, and leaving the Mayor, who has sought refuge in the house, to ponder over his words at his leisure, and to make as much or as little of them as he can.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH MR. TARTAR MAKES BUT POOR  
PROGRESS.

MISS TWINKLETON and Rosa had met with a pleasant set of rooms in Brighton facing the sea, from the bow-windows of which they could watch the brightly-dressed visitors to that renowned watering-place who, sauntering by, for the most part as bright-faced and cheerful as their attire, looked as if they had cast off London care with London dust and smoke, and made up their minds to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

Their landlady, also, was as gay and pleasant in appearance as the rooms themselves, and might have been made to match them; so there was every reason to hope that the roses on both ladies' cheeks, faded in the thunderous atmosphere surrounding the Bilkickin, would bloom again, or make room for new ones.

The fresh air, blowing from the sea; the music of the rolling waves, sometimes varied—and variety is ever charming—by the music from “German Bands” upon the Pro-

menade ; the rows of blooming schoolgirls, walking together in twos and threes, headed by a young teacher, as giddy as themselves, and brought up in the rear by a female dragon, stern of visage and Argus-eyed, reminding Rosa of her own happy school days ; the joyous laugh from the children, building speedily-demolished sand-castles on the beach ; the brightness and cheerfulness on every hand, so pleasant a contrast to the roar and rattle, grit and dust of the vast Babylon they had left behind—all these things cheered Rosa, and lightened the load on her sad young heart, while above all, the sacred influence of Nature raised soft echoes there ; and the sweet song of hope, which she had stifled, or believed to stifle, thrilled again within her ; tremulously as yet, but ever with increasing power.

What though she had shut out for herself, by her own free act, one large field—perhaps the largest—of human happiness ! Were not other paths open, in which she might tread, and, though more modestly, still quaff from that intoxicating draught for which all human beings long ? Was there not sweetness, too, pure from heaven, and infinitely more lasting than anything earth can yield, in voluntary self-sacrifice ? Would

it not bring a reward along with it—a reward exclusively its own?

Her heart swelled with tender pity, as she reflected how solitary her guardian's life had been—that good, good man—and she longed, in her simple way, to make it brighter. She even yearned towards Miss Twinkleton; and, making light of her sometimes trying airs and graces—such small blemishes, when weighed in the balance against her kind heart—ministered to her wants, and submitted to her control, with a gentleness and wistful love so sweet and touching, that the good lady was more than once moved to tears, and to declare emphatically to their buxom landlady that she would challenge the world to produce such another sweet creature as her little Rosebud; to which the landlady would assent with fervour, adding (this being her highest degree of praise or of reward), that Miss Rosa ought to marry a “Dook.”

And even as the mere effort to do right had brought inward peace with it, so the self-sacrificing resolution which Rosa had formed, and confided to her friend brought its share of peace, too.

Her earnest hope, her firm confidence, that the dread man, who had been the bane and



evil influence of her life, must be satisfied when he came to see—as he would in time—that she had resolved to favour no other, calmed her fears for her friends, and relieved her tender conscience from the burden which had so terribly oppressed it—that she was bringing danger and unhappiness upon those she loved best, and would have shielded, had she known how, with her life itself.

Yet, with all these reasons for comfort, and knowing that they were not mere illusions, but had real and solid comfort in them, Rosa felt, nevertheless, that peace was not happiness.

Struggling to believe it so, she knew that she struggled in vain; and, breaking down sometimes, and giving way under this conviction, she would shed tears not wholly free from bitterness; often weeping when alone, and where no Miss Twinkleton could come upon her unawares, until she was forced to cease from pure exhaustion.

And besides this, in her innocent mind, all unconscious of real evil, her pretty, coquettish graces which, after all, were natural and born with her, and which she could as little control as she could hinder the rosy flush upon her cheek, or the brightness of her dark eyes, or every other charm of her lovely little

face that, like the tender song of the nightingale, or the sweet perfume of the violet, thrilled the hearts of all near her, not only with pleasure, but oftentimes exquisite pain, —even these seemed to rise up against her, and condemn her.

And with burning cheek, hanging head, and beating heart, she would fancy that God, looking down from His bright heaven upon her, frowningly, had sent these heavy trials as punishment for her foolish little vanities ; and, hiding her face, even from the solitude around, would weep once more.

At such moments the poor child, bowed down with remorse and shame, as if she had committed some heinous crime, would remember how—as she had confessed to Helena—even the fierce admiration of her music-master, terrible though it was, had been, nevertheless, at first, a sort of gratification to her ; how the love of power common to her sex had stirred within her, and her tickled vanity had laughed to see how willingly this stern, unapproachable man, cold and indifferent to others—with the one exception of his nephew—had bowed in humblest submission to her tiny sceptre ; how one frown from her could blanch his cheek, and one smile, however careless, make him happier

than a monarch; the while she, with inward triumph, had dimly realised the mighty strength of that weapon, with which the weakest and frailest woman may be armed, and which, though wielded by hands fragile as fair, may carry *death* in every blow.

Alas, alas! O, awful and terrible suspicion, growing into certainty, that to gratify this poor little vanity, even for a moment, this fearful weapon had been raised, and, falling from the hand, playing with it carelessly, like the untrained hand of a child, had, nevertheless, fallen with such dread purpose, and such fearful aim—though aimless—that it had struck down another in his prime. And Rosa, covering her face again with a shudder, wondered if it were hard to die.

She had often pitied her young mother, cut off in the flower of her beauty, and had shed many a childish tear over her grave; less for herself, for she could not remember a mother's care, and therefore never felt its loss; but for the fair young creature, before whom might have lain so many years of happiness; but now an old adage came into her head, that "those whom the gods love die young," and with a lonely feeling for herself, as if they loved her no longer, but had sentenced her to a whole eternity of dreary life, she felt

thankful that her mother had been spared the bitterness which was weighing her little daughter to the earth.

On a bright sunny morning, after they had been about a week at Brighton, Rosa, leaving Miss Twinkleton and the landlady, in deep discussion about the dinner, and knowing that on such occasions she could well be spared, slipped away down to the beach, bent on finding out some cosy nook by the water, where she could sit undisturbed, her hot head fanned by the cooling sea breeze, and refresh herself—for in whatever gloomy channel her thoughts ran, they always did refresh her—with the glories of the sea.

The beach was crowded with people of all conditions, ranks, and ages. Anxious mothers helped delicate daughters to make preparations for the invigorating sea bath. Busy nursery maids, now scolding, now persuading, undressed the children under their care; while others superintended the gambols of the laughing, shrieking, splashing little ones already in the water, their soft white limbs glancing in the sun like ivory. Fair-haired and dark-haired girls, attired in all sorts of fantastic bathing costumes, with their white arms bare, and their long wet hair streaming over their shoulders, sported like mer-

maids in their native element; ducking, dancing, screaming, shouting, swimming, floating, making noise enough for a pack of schoolboys, and casting aside as superfluous at the Court of King Neptune, that decorous demeanour, which, of course, distinguished them in the drawing-room, or on the promenade; while rows of gentlemen, half-lying, half-sitting among the pebbles, viewed and criticised these daughters of Old England, with a shamelessness quite unparalleled.

Shouting men brought this machine into the water, and the other out. Troops of donkeys, laden with little people, tramped or trotted across the beach, and sometimes (to vary the sameness, no doubt), one of the herd would suddenly and unexpectedly kick up its heels and shoot its astonished little rider over its head into the pebbles, then stand still reflectively, as if to say, "Dear me! how did that happen?"

Sometimes a sharp slap, followed by a sharper cry, gave indication that some worried nursemaid had momentarily lost her temper and inflicted condign punishment upon her little torment, yet finding, it is to be hoped, what she had lost once more by this close contact with the children; but fun and frolic were the order of the day, and for this short

space of time, human nature showed itself unreservedly as human nature. How could it be otherwise! for the fresh breeze from the sea carried with it far inland all restraining and confining influences of fashion and etiquette, leaving mankind, like itself, free as air.

Rosa, with a laughing glance towards the bathers, and a nod of recognition for one or two among them, went by with even a quicker step than before, for the noise and tumult were anything but congenial to her feelings.

She passed, also, a group of robust seamen who greeted her kindly in their rough ready way, and one of them, who had lost a bright-eyed daughter many years before, looked wistfully down upon the beautiful little face, sending after her a hearty "God bless ye, Missy."

Leaving them, too, behind, Rosa went on until she came to a spot secluded enough to satisfy her. A large boat, drawn up high upon the shore, afforded her protection against the hot sun, and shut out all sight and almost all sound of the multitude upon the beach.

The glorious sea spread out before her danced deep blue in reflection of the heaven above, and only a few ships and boats far out

at sea came from time to time between her and Nature.

She had brought a book and some needle-work, but she soon let them fall, and, leaning back against the sheltering boat, her white hands clasped upon her knees, fixed her eyes upon the dazzling water. The soft breeze lifted her hair, kissed her cheek, played about and caressed her, as if never weary, while the inexhaustible spring of hope in her nature—God's choicest gift to youth—bubbled up fresh and clear, whispering perpetually that all her sorrows were but transitory, and that happiness, real happiness, for which she longed, was still in store for her. The waves, breaking gently at her feet, sang the same melody, and the white sea-gulls, skimming the blue water, seemed like messengers of peace and love.

Nature, the handmaid of God, was comforting her body, and God Himself was comforting her soul.

With a soft, dreamy sensation stealing over her; a peace and comfort indescribable; a feeling of security and happiness which she had not felt for months; she lazily watched the boats upon the water rowing to and fro—some fishing-smacks, manned by sunburnt, hard-featured, and hard-handed mariners;

some pleasure boats, brightly painted, and with gay awnings to shield the passengers from the burning sunshine, until at last her attention was attracted to a smart little yacht, which appeared to be bearing straight towards the spot where she was sitting. Its white sails fluttered merrily in the breeze, and the figure-head seemed, to her idle fancy, to be leaning intently forward to spy her out in her hiding-place.

Smiling at her own folly, Rosa, nevertheless, watched with interest the natty little craft which evidently intended to put in at Brighton; and as it came nearer, she saw that there were gentlemen on board. With half-closed eyes she noticed all this, and noted it sleepily in some corner of her brain; and then the delicious drowsiness was not to be contended against any longer—she had slept but little the night before—and, lulled by the soft murmur of the waves, her heavy lids closed quite, and she fell fast asleep.

In her dreams the yacht, which had been the last object apparent to her waking senses, still haunted her. She seemed to see it plainly still, as it sailed straight towards her, ever nearer and nearer, until at last, with a grating sound, it stranded upon the sand at her feet, and the mysterious figure-head, coming



out of its place and approaching her, revealed itself before her astonished vision as—Mr. Tartar.

Mr. Tartar ! who from head and upper part, came into sudden possession of a body and legs, in a manner which would have been miraculous out of the land of dreams, and which startled Rosa, not a little, even there ; for she was looking now with her eyes wide open—her hat fallen off, and her hair dishevelled—right into the blue orbs of the sea-lieutenant : into the blue eyes of Mr. Tartar which looked out smilingly from his sun-burnt visage as he stood, hat in hand, looking down upon her.

Springing up hurriedly, covered with confusion and blushes which enhanced her loveliness (at least the sea-lieutenant seemed to think so) a thousand-fold, Rosa rubbed her eyes, to punish them for their laziness, and with a puzzled look at the sea, where no yacht was to be seen, came at last to the conclusion that she had been sleeping, and was now awake, and that she must have been sleeping for some time, for the water, which had been almost at her feet, had retreated some distance, leaving a wide stretch of land before her.

The sea-lieutenant appeared in no hurry,

not in the least; he stood as steadily and quietly as if he were stationed there in performance of his duty, and would have been ready and willing to stand another hour; yet his blue eyes seemed totally indifferent to the glories of the sea and sky before him, and to have only thought and feeling for the sweet face on which he gazed.

“How did you come here?” inquired Rosa, still colouring deeply, and so angry with herself for doing so that tears of vexation came into her eyes. “Oh, if anything is the matter, tell me so at once.”

At these words, Mr. Tartar recovered the use of his tongue, and the rest of his senses, all of which, with the exception of sight (which had been put, as it were, under high pressure) appeared to have deserted him (or perhaps had been absorbed into that faculty), and becoming aware of the indiscretion of staring a young lady out of countenance, turned as red as she, and began to murmur an apology.

“Nothing whatever was the matter, and he begged her pardon for having startled her by appearing before her so unexpectedly. He had been looking for her, commissioned to do so by Mr. Grewgious, who was now waiting for them at the lodgings, and finding her so

sound asleep, had not dared to disturb her slumbers. Would she forgive him, and believe that he—that he—in short (quite overwhelmed with confusion), it *was* a dilemma, now, wasn't it?"

Rosa, busy smoothing her ruffled curls, and arranging her hat, made no attempt to answer that question, being absorbed in another; to wit: what would the girls say, if they knew, which they never should, that he had found her asleep; and her hair as rough as rough could be? And how modest and handsome he looked standing there, with his hat still in his hand! How nice he was; so brave and gentlemanlike! If that dreadful something hadn't happened; would it, could it ever have come to pass, that he, and she—

"O, you wicked, little inconsistent thing, you ought to be locked up on bread and water and never let out any more! What's the good of making resolutions only to wish to break them? Go along with you, and take that for your pains! I hate the very sight of you!"

The "that" was a sharp pinch upon her round arm, accompanied by a severe promise of many more if its owner didn't behave herself. For, "what can be weaker," thought Rosa, "than to falter in a resolution so earnestly made, and only because a man looks

nice and handsome. Oh," she continued, apostrophising herself with bitterness, "you weak creature! I've quite lost all confidence in you, and if you don't take care, I shall never trust you again." Then she turned round to the waiting sea-lieutenant, who, fearing that he had grievously offended her, was standing a picture of abject misery, and inquired (her hat being now arranged as well as it could be without a looking-glass, "though no doubt quite crooked," thought Rosa): "When Mr. Grewgious had come to Brighton, and if he knew why?"

"We all came together," explained Mr. Tartar, "about an hour ago; Mr. Chrisparkle and myself in my yacht (the weather is so lovely, that I persuaded my old master to a little trip with me), and Mr. Grewgious came down by train to meet us here. I thought," he continued modestly, "that perhaps the ladies would favour us with their company on board for a few hours. The weather is all that can be desired, and Lobley, my man, you know, is quite enraptured at the idea of doing the honours of the water. He was running to seed in London, and it would be a matter of charity to give him something to do. Would she—would Miss Twinkleton gratify them both, and let him show them Brighton from the sea?"

“It was very kind of him,” said Rosa, flushing with delight at the prospect, “and she should like it very much.”

Fortified by this encouragement which was the first genuine feeling of her girlish heart, longing for pleasure, and given in momentary forgetfulness of her resolution, the sea-lieutenant immediately offered her his arm. It was an unfortunate action, for it reminded her of what she had forgotten, and first punishing herself by a second severe pinch, she declined it promptly.

“This will never do,” she thought. “I am too weak to put myself in the way of temptation. I dare not go with him. I am a great deal too fond of being petted and made much of. I ought not to care about it, I know, but I’m so vain and silly, that I do. I wonder if my whole future life will be made up of such conflicts. When I am old and ugly, no one will want to pet me. Oh, dear, dear, I am really sorry for poor, poor little Rosa! I don’t pinch you, my dear, because I am angry with you, but only to make you better.” Then, aloud, with a severe eye upon her resolution, as she tripped along at his side—

“I should like to go myself, Mr. Tartar; very much, I am sure; but I am afraid Miss Twinkleton won’t. Now I come to think of

it, I am certain she won't. She's just the sort of person to be extremely sea-sick, and though she might say 'yes,' not to disappoint me, I couldn't accept the sacrifice on any account; so, though I am very, very sorry you have had so much trouble for nothing, I fear we must give it up."

Upon hearing which decree, the sea-lieutenant's spirits, which had fallen a few degrees already, went down rapidly to zero, and he eyed her with a mournful gaze which touched her tender heart.

She began to wonder again—this time puzzling her little head, as to why it was so difficult to do right; and even to know, with certainty, what was right. She wanted to be good; she wanted to avoid being the cause of undeserved suffering to others, and was willing to suffer herself instead; and now, here was another who would be happy if she only took thought for herself. She knew it was so, by the sinking of her overburdened heart. Oh, if she had but a mother to tell her what was really right, and what she ought to do!

So she walked by his side, sad and troubled, while he was feeling somehow as if the sunshine had faded, and the laughter of the merrymakers on the beach were hollow mockery.

Presently Rosa asked, how it was that they had known where to look for her, and her companion explained that Miss Twinkleton had told them she was probably upon the beach; that he and Mr. Chrisparkle had volunteered to go and look for her; and that, after a short search, he had lighted upon her resting-place. The Minor Canon was no doubt searching still.

At the thought of the Revd. Septimus walking to and fro, and hunting up and down, all that time in vain, Rosa couldn't help mischievously laughing. The sea-lieutenant, greatly relieved, joined in the merry laugh. The sun came out from behind the cloud, and even the screams and shouts of the frolicsome children sounded quite pleasantly in his ears. Is not the light without often, nearly always, only a reflection of the light within?

"I must have seen your yacht, I think," said Rosa, "yet I never dreamed that it was yours. How funny!"—she was thinking of her dream.

They were now close to the lodgings, and Rosa fancied that she could distinguish Miss Twinkleton's stiff curls, and Mr. Grewgious' smooth head, behind the curtains of the bow window; when it occurred to her that it was

hardly fair to Mr. Chrisparkle to leave him to his fate; and with her usual impulsive quickness she said so.

Mr. Tartar was quite of opinion that they certainly must go and look for him. It had occurred to him before, but he had not liked to propose it, for fear of fatiguing her. Mr. Tartar appeared not to entertain the possibility that he might go alone. And his spirits rose with alarming rapidity right up to boiling point.

“Oh, you stupid little thing!” said Rosa, to herself, punishing again with remorseless severity her soft, plump arm. “Why can’t you hold your silly little tongue until you are spoken to? Don’t you know that little girls must be seen and not heard? You are old enough not to belong to that category, but I fear you’ll never, in wisdom, come out of it. It would be better to bite off your chattering little tongue than let it blab out everything the instant it comes into your ridiculous head. *You* make a resolution, and *you* keep it! I should like to trample on you.”

But it was no use abusing herself, which she did most heartily, during the search for Mr. Chrisparkle, reflecting upon her “common sense,” as she called it, with sarcastic bitterness; she could not recall her words, nor recall



the hopes—with what a sinking of heart she felt it—which he built upon them.

And, oh dear! what a long time they were in finding Mr. Chrisparkle! As if that gentleman had provided himself with a coat of invisibility for the occasion; or, in league with Mr. Tartar, shrouded his cheerful countenance in a veil too dense to penetrate. Once or twice, Rosa felt almost sure she saw him in the distance; but she must have been mistaken, for Mr. Tartar, whose eyes, as he gravely informed her, were so accustomed to distinguish objects far ahead, as to be incapable of erring, always persisted that she was wrong, and turning would recommence the search from an opposite direction.

It was remarkable, too, that in spite of their hurry, the sea-lieutenant's pace was extremely easy; and when Rosa rather uneasily proposed that they should mend it, he informed her that having only just "cast" his sea-legs, as it were, he found it difficult to get accustomed to his land ones; he hoped, however, that with time and patience, he might yet learn to use them with a landsman's agility. Furthermore, she could not help noticing, that his far-seeing eyes, instead of sweeping the distance, rested repeatedly on her face, where of course he could not expect,

to find Mr. Chrisparkle ; and she could have cried with vexation, as she keenly realised that he made use of the bright blushes which his earnest gaze called up there, as nutriment for his hopes. But that a certain sense of womanly dignity kept her where she was, she would like to have covered her hot face with her hands, and ran away from his side, to hide her mortification. It was no good chastising her arm till it was black and blue, or would be to-morrow ; that did not help her in the least. And the worst, and hardest of it was, that she could not help liking and admiring him through it all. She tried to think she hated him for having compelled her to this penance, but she knew in her inmost soul that that was all pretence. Her childish heart swelled almost to bursting, and only pride and shame prevented her breaking into passionate tears.

At length, when she could speak without betraying her emotion, she expressed her determination to return to the lodgings ; for, on the one hand, Miss Twinkleton would be shocked at her remaining out so long ; and, on the other, she felt certain that Mr. Chrisparkle was waiting for them there, and had given up the search as hopeless, long ago.

Of course, Mr. Tartar had no resource but

to accompany her ; and lo, and behold ! as they recrossed the beach, there was the Revd. Septimus, bearing down upon them full sail, very warm from hard walking, and the faintest, tiniest, little idea of a shadow on his face.

After warmly greeting Rosa, and expressing his pleasure at seeing her look so well—poor child, the bright colour on her cheeks had been called up by shame and vexation !—he turned wonderingly towards his friend.

“Why, Tartar, what on earth have you been running away from me for ? I’ve seen you twenty times, and then, as if by magic, you disappeared. It’s made me uncommonly warm,” he continued, taking off his hat, to let the fresh sea-breeze play about his temples, “and reminded me of as stiff a game of hide and seek as I ever played in my life.”

But nothing could surpass the exceeding innocence of the sea-lieutenant’s answering look. It was rather over than under-done, and might have aroused suspicion even in any less enquiring mind. And Mr. Chrisparkle, taught himself by that new, strange feeling which, once aroused, was for ever singing such glorious melodies in his heart, read something in those blue orbs steadily facing his which raised within him an echo clear and loud ;

and the faintest, tiniest idea possible of a shadow passed away from his radiant face, beaming now upon the two before him like the sun in his strength.

Rosa, however, declared that she had no faith any more in sea-eyes, at any rate for inland purposes; and in a little spirit of revenge, or perhaps only to prove to herself her continued adherence to her fatal resolution, accepted Mr. Chrisparkle's arm, as decidedly as she had refused the sea-lieutenant's.

Notwithstanding this rebuff, keenly felt, Mr. Tartar, after a rapid, searching scrutiny of his old master's face, resulting in the conviction that he had nothing to fear from him, consoled himself with the reflection that this up and down hill work might be the normal condition of the road he had started upon; and, finding satisfaction enough for the present, in contemplation of the beautiful girl he was learning to love so fast, paced on, on the other side of Rosa, developing an agility in his land legs totally inconsistent with the character he had given them, and with spirits which refused to be quenched, and hopes which would not succumb.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A DAY UPON THE WATER.

IN the pretty parlour, directly opposite Miss Twinkleton, sits Mr. Grewgious, waiting for the return of his ward. The poor man has found the time long. He has been bountifully regaled with a moral repast; and, to judge by the appearance of his discomfited look, perplexed face, and ruffled locks—ruffled from excess of smoothing—seems to have found it rather strong than savoury. He is now engaged in digesting it, and is troubled by the reflection that it must be some serious fault in his organisation which makes it disagree with him.

The lady, his *vis-à-vis*, who has paused in the midst of her eloquence from sheer want of breath to proceed, although matching him to a miracle in point of angularness, is by no means a sharer in his depressed condition. On the contrary, her expressive countenance beams with the mild radiance and modest self-approval with which a countenance, sensible of having distinguished itself, may justly beam. She is serenely conscious of

having made a deep impression on the mind of Mr. Grewgious, and full of hope that it is a permanent one.

It is, indeed, though not in the sense in which she would have it. For the future, simple-minded Mr. Grewgious will be sensible of a sensation of fear in her respected presence—harmless creature though she be in deed, and only terrible in word—like the fear of a naughty child, in presence of a stern preceptor, feeling already in anticipation the smart of the chastising rod, and tingling still at the remembrance of the last infliction, though over long ago. For there are certain women who know how to make their tongue an instrument of sharp punishment, and Miss Twinkleton was no novice in this noble art.

In point of fact, the estimable lady has attained therein so high a proficiency, that in her “Establishment for Young Ladies” she has rarely need to inflict any other penalty, and on this account is an object of envy to her colleagues. But there are two sides to everything, even an advantage may have its disadvantages; and thus this attribute, though most efficient with her pupils—whom she never allows to forget that, however suave and benignant her mood at the moment, this dreaded rod, supple and pliant, is always in

reserve—has the effect of so completely subduing any other member of the human race, not gifted with more than the usual amount of audacity, whom she favours with her conversation, as to prevent the possibility of feeling at ease in her presence, even when she is radiant with good humour. The instinctive consciousness, which such a one feels, of being seated upon a couch, not of roses, but of sharpest thorns, in which, though harmless for the nonce, any inadvertent movement may develop their natural propensity to prick, is rather alarming on the whole, and eminently calculated to make even the most cold-blooded philosopher nervous and uneasy.

“My good lady, or gentleman,” this excellent instructress of youth will seem to say, “you are, at this present, basking in the sunshine of my favour; your behaviour and your views merit my approbation, but—the rod is in pickle! Should occasion occur—which I should deeply regret—I shall not hesitate to judiciously and unsparingly make use of it. No wincing or shrinking on your part will stay the hand raised for your good. This is my duty,” Miss Twinkleton will appear to add, “and my duty is my pleasure.” And bridling, the good lady seems willing and ready to receive the compliments of all creation.

Not that Miss Twinkleton has the least idea, on this occasion, that she has been hard on Mr. Grewgious. She has only been endeavouring to instil a little iron into the softness of his heart. Indeed, her feelings, and, God knows, what secret hopes, prompt her to be unusually kind and gracious to him ; kinder and more gracious, she acknowledges to herself with a little sigh, than she had been in her untried youthful days to "foolish Mr. Porter." Ah, poor, foolish Mr. Porter!

But the downcast and depressed physiognomy of Mr. Grewgious brightens up amazingly at sight of his ward, and of her glowing cheeks ; and when she, with a little burst of delight at feeling herself safe again under his protection, throws her arms around his neck, letting her loosened brown curls play about it, to press her warm, soft lips to his withered face, he reddens, bashful as a schoolboy. But he likes it. Oh, he likes it ! Proud, happy and elate, he enters into a mental calculation as to how much Mr. Chrisparkle would give for it, and how much more, multiplied a hundred-fold, Mr. Tartar. And he forgets all about Miss Twinkleton and her rod in pickle, as he lays his favoured arm round Rosa's waist, and, drawing the sweet little flushed face close to his to let



his short-sighted eyes feast upon it at their ease, asks her what has kept them so long.

It is naughty of Rosa! It is utterly unanswerable, inconsiderate and non-resolution-like of Rosa, with those wistful blue eyes upon her! Why, if even Mr. Chrisparkle, with his heart full of the remembrance of another girlish figure; with tender recollections of other warm lips upon his hand; with eyes softening even now at the thought of other dark eyes, so haughty and resolute for the rest of the world, so gentle and submissive when they meet his—why, if even Mr. Chrisparkle looks on with admiration, and, perhaps, some envy, what must be the feelings of the sea-lieutenant? It is naughty of Rosa, with those longing eyes upon her face!

And, alas for her resolution, doomed to be attacked so fatally this morning! What on earth can she have been thinking of to make such a monstrous and incomprehensible assertion, to wit: that she believes Miss Twinkleton is afraid of the water. Has Rosa ever known—Miss T. puts the question with stern pathos and total forgetfulness of the Billickin—has Rosa ever known her afraid of anything? Is Miss Twinkleton not already dressed—quite youthfully and charmingly

dressed—for the occasion? And she will not cast a damper upon the pleasure in prospect by referring, however distantly, to a word in private and in season which she must address to her young charge as to the impropriety of remaining alone so long upon the beach. (This is an inkling of the pickling rod, but though Mr. Grewgious quakes in his shoes, Rosa is hardened, and takes it very coolly.) And so speaking, Miss T. hurries Rosa away to make her toilette. “As if the gods,” thinks the poor child, disconsolately, “as if the gods themselves disdain her sacrifice, scorn her poor offering, and, casting back her too-late penitence, condemn her—most cruel punishment of all—to break another heart before her own.”

Miss Twinkleton, seating herself with a resolute air on the edge of the bed, watches Rosa's sacrifice—not to her resolution, but to the Graces—and occasionally throws in a word of counsel or dissuasion. Pretty Rosebud, listlessly making her simple preparations, half sad and half glad, in an undecided state between laughter and tears, now strongly inclining to the latter, and now to the former, is as nearly hysterical as her sound and healthy body and mind render possible. She smoothes her ruffled hair, then ruffles it

again; dons first one hat, and then another; bent, contrary to her usual habit, on making herself as unattractive as possible, in which laudable intent she succeeds so indifferently—the looking-glass showing her lovely little face after each change lovelier than ever—that she grows at last quite angry with her own beauty; and, but for Miss Twinkleton, would have certainly tried the patience of the gentlemen below to an unreasonable extent.

Now it happens that that lady, usually so discreet, has caught a glimpse of Mr. Tartar's longing blue eyes, and interpreted their unspoken words, not only without anger, but also with a certain satisfaction. Her pretty charge united to that handsome gentleman; herself—ahem!—united to a gentleman whose moral qualities more than compensate for his want of personal attractions—what further need of professing to regard these possible events as otherwise than natural and desirable? With the cap of the matron upon her corkscrew curls, Miss T. feels that she would be even capable of avowing, that, after all, the fetters of matrimony are easier to bear than is the burden of single blessedness.

“Put on your broad hat, my love,” she says, wholly misunderstanding Rosa's irresolution. “It will shield your complexion

from the burning sun; and in no other do you look, I think, quite so pretty. Not," adds Miss Twinkleton, "that beauty is of the least account whatever; for if the heart be fair and white, it must be a matter of total indifference of what hue is the skin, even if it should be the skin of a blackamoor. To a Christian eye," says Miss Twinkleton, who cannot resist the opportunity of improving the occasion (when can she ever resist it?), "the sight of a Christian negro is far more attractive than that of the most beautiful English girl whose heart is worldly."

"Yes, ma'am," says Rosa, whose thoughts are not among the blackamoors.

"But as I cherish the well-grounded hope," continues Miss Twinkleton, benignantly, "that my Rosebud's heart is as fair and beautiful as her body, I venture to offer my sincerest congratulations."

"Congratulations?" Rosa lifts her bright eyes to say it, then lets them fall again, to hide the starting tears.

"Even my enemies," continues Miss Twinkleton, disregarding the enquiring exclamation, or rather regarding it in the light of an equivocation, "never have accused me of being blind; it stands to reason, therefore, that I cannot permit it from my pupils."

“I assure you, Miss Twinkleton—”

“Neither,” interrupted that lady, raising her gloved hand, “am I without experience in this respect, as, perhaps, you may childishly imagine. By no means. I have had to exercise a woman’s—alas!—sometimes painful duty, and break hearts before now. Heaven grant that my presentiments may be unfounded, and that I may escape the pain of having to do so again. But why tear open wounds barely closed? You never visited ‘The Wells;’ you never knew ‘foolish Mr. Porter.’”

“No,” says Rosa, astonished at this burst, “but—”

“Peace, my child! Let us drop the subject if you wish it. I will not compel a confidence, which has no worth, unless it be spontaneous. The lease of my authority over you has expired. I am now only your (Miss Twinkleton is just going to say maternal, but, catching herself up with an ahem! substitutes, for reasons of her own, sisterly) ahem! sisterly friend; and only as such do I make a claim on your consideration.”

“Dear Miss Twinkleton—”

But again the fates interpose to prevent Rosa clearing herself from the suspicion of being in love with Mr. Tartar, for a move-

ment downstairs as of impatiently pacing gentlemanly feet so alarms Miss Twinkleton, before whose lively imagination arises a vision of the yacht stranded ; Lobley's sunflower face behind a cloud ; the gentlemanly feet pacing off without them ; and her own hopes for ever shattered ; that she almost drags Rosa downstairs again into the parlour, where they arrive, breathless.

Still breathless, Rosa finds herself on the road to the shore, supported by Mr. Tartar and Mr. Chrisparkle, while Miss Twinkleton follows close behind, her virgin hand resting on Mr. Grewgious' stiffly bent arm, and her faded blue eyes brightened with unwonted light, as she smiles into his face, improving the occasion, and deeming herself already in Elysium.

Poor, martyred Mr. Grewgious ! he smarts under her well-applied words, as he has smarted, when a boy, under castigation (unmerited, of course), and suffers in silence now as then. Shamefaced, yet too proud to complain, and too helpless to retort, he only ventures to wish the ground would open and swallow him up ; and it is an unspeakable relief when a wind, coming between them, and, bearing his hat from his head (a straw hat, bought for the occasion, and which from the first has

obstinately refused to accommodate itself to his unaccommodating head), carries it out to sea. His prayers have been heard, as it seems. One of the elements has had pity on him.

In the scuffle which ensues, (Mr. Tartar and Mr. Chrisparkle immediately set out in pursuit of the runaway, though in vain), he becomes separated from Miss Twinkleton, and, in process of time, is conducted on board the yacht, still in a state of extreme bewilderment, and enveloped in a cap of Mr. Tartar's, a world too big; which, slipping over his eyes, shuts him up within himself, and leaves him at liberty to indulge in his reflections.

He makes no effort to extricate himself. As he cannot see Miss Twinkleton, he deludes himself with the hope that he is safe from this lady, whom he begins to dread, not only on account of her volubility, but for another reason, intangible as yet, but which makes him quake in every limb. Have we not all, in this respect, a certain sixth sense?

He is aroused from his unfounded sense of security by the sound of a sharp voice at his ear, which makes him start, as if it were the renewed lash of the whip hitting him on a

tender spot. It is the dreadful voice of Miss Twinkleton.

Far too entirely a true gentleman of the old English school to disregard it, he pushes back his refractory cap and regards the speaker with a look of as polite attention as he can assume.

“This is pleasure, indeed, Mr. Grewgious!”

If it be, then give him misery. If it be, then welcome back again Staple Inn, and the dusty, musty offices of P. J. T. If it be, then avaunt pleasure, most unpleasant of emotions, for ever, from the heart, hearth and home of Hiram Grewgious!

He is marmuring some compromise between his inmost thoughts, and the sentiments which politeness would seem to demand, when a roll of the ship sends the cap over his eyes again, and shuts out simultaneously both Miss Twinkleton and the heaving sea.

“The wind is rising,” pursues Miss Twinkleton, whose spirits are rising, too, to an appalling degree, and who is exhibiting unmistakable signs of a highly alarming preceptorial gaiety (she is lacerating her victim on two sides now, which is against all rule and right, as every schoolboy knows)



“and our attentive host has just informed me that our fairy craft is going at the rate of—I forget how many—knots an hour.” (Miss Twinkleton lays an emphasis on the word knots, as an intimation that she always puts the right word in the right place).

Something very unpleasant, indeed—not wind—is rising in Mr. Grewgious’ throat, but with a tremendous effort he gulps it down, and once more emerging from his cap, looks about him.

He is on board the prettiest little yacht imaginable, the whole world challenged. With her snowy sails wide spread, and her bright colours flying, she skims the blue water like a sea-gull.

Mr. Grewgious, in spite of those painful sensations in his bosom, or, in point of fact, rather lower, is struck with genuine admiration, and is opening his mouth to say so, when Miss Twinkleton interposes again with the rapturous enquiry, “If he does not dote upon the water?”

Mr. Grewgious tells her he is diffident of giving a positive assent to this, his experience having been, so far, very limited; confined as yet, to tell the truth, to boating on the Thames.

Oh, dear ! He is a world behind Miss Twinkleton ! He is centuries in arrear as compared to her ! Not to mention pupils from the East and West Indies ; nor the brother of one young lady, who emigrated to the Cape ; nor the father of another, who was offered an appointment in Japan ; (Miss Twinkleton, somewhat vaguely, seems to imagine that the several experiences of these gentlemen have become her own through the connection) she has once, at a remote period, which she has forgotten, and which she asserts on the authority of an aunt, crossed to the Isle of Wight ; and once, under the guardianship of her respected parents, to Boulogne.

Never can she forget, though she had at that period, graced the earth but nine fleeting summers, never shall she forget the fearful storm which memorialized that occasion, nor the tribute paid by her parents to the angry, exacting, trident-bearing god, whom to know is to admire.

For her own part, she had been able to defy him, and therefore might consider herself, without undue exaltation, as seasoned against the malady.

It is a fatal topic for unhappy Mr. Grewgious, who is by no means seasoned ; and he struggles to introduce another.

Looking round for a subject, his eye rests upon the ship, and he murmurs vacantly —

“She is really charming.”

He hardly knows himself what he is saying.

Over Miss Twinkleton’s maidenly cheek spreads a flush of pleasure. “She is really charming.” Is it not a spontaneous tribute, which he can suppress no longer? She casts down her eyes modestly, and waits for the continuation. It is not long in coming.

“She tacks,” continues Mr. Grewgious, forgetting his fears of Miss Twinkleton, forgetting everything but his desperate desire to avert attention from himself, and delay the terrible catastrophe, “she tacks in a manner surpassing my highest expectations.” He has the vaguest idea imaginable as to what “tacking” is: only believing that it is the proper thing for a ship to do; and little dreams in his bodily and mental agony as to the fatal construction which may be put upon his words, which he utters with a gasp.

“He alludes to my conversational powers,” thinks Miss Twinkleton, “and that is his manly way of expressing it. How little I imagined this morning, what this day held in store for me. Adieu, long-cherished image of foolish Mr. Porter!”

“I am quite in love with her,” continues

the unhappy gentleman, with a hand upon his agitated stomach.

“ Adieu, quiet Cloisterham ! Adieu Nuns’ House ! Farewell for ever, sweet pupils, innocent and unconscious rivals.”

Joyful tears rise to the eyes of Miss Twinkleton, and a half smothered sob escapes the confines of her breast. Rosy and seductive winks the bright future ; a glorious contrast to the hard, dull, solitary past.

Cruel Mr. Grewgious ! Bury thy discomfited face and scanty locks for the future in thy neglected office, among the relics of centuries ! Cover thy diminished head with the dust and ashes of P. J. T. and his contemporaries ! Such as thou, harmless and innocent as the dove, without the wiliness of the serpent, are sadly out of place in this manœuvring and speculating nineteenth century, and belong, most emphatically, to the long forgotten period of seventeen forty-seven.

Heedless Mr. Grewgious ! What benignant power may interfere to save thee, ere too late ? Thy foot is on the verge of an abyss, and one more heedless step must precipitate thee over it. How canst thou have forgotten that the same personal pronoun, third person singular, is made use of for a ship and for a female ? How canst even thou

have forgotten that a lady—a lady of a dangerous age is at thy side?

But again an element interferes to rescue the Collector of Rents, and this time, water; god Neptune demands immediate payment of his toll.

Mr. Grewgious suddenly and unceremoniously turns his back on the expectant Miss Twinkleton, and shows her an unmistakably cold shoulder. In his modesty; for though he desperately chafes his agonised stomach, the crisis has arrived.

Falling into the extended arms of Lobley, who turns up at the very nick of time, the prostrate gentleman is conveyed into the tiny cabin by that dexterous seaman, before even Miss Twinkleton has discovered anything more than that she is shamefully deluded.

She colours high with shame and futile anger, and turning her face towards the sea, affecting to admire the prospect, lets a few salt tears course over her sharp, high cheek bones, to join the countless salt drops below. Poor, forlorn little schoolmistress! A woman's heart beats under thy withered bosom, and a woman's instinctive desire to love and to be loved, has not died out even yet. Perhaps, it never will die. Perhaps, who knows, in a future state it may be bountifully gratified.

In the meantime cease to struggle with thy destiny—appointed by God. But, one thing avoid, Miss Twinkleton. Never pretend to scorn and despise a state thou would'st gladly share, nor feign a contempt for others, more blessed than thou.

And to thy honour, be it said, Miss Twinkleton, the milk of human kindness in thy nature, though sometimes hemmed and hindered, has never curdled or run dry! The tears which course down her face, to lose themselves in the great ocean, fed by many tears of human suffering, though salt as the waters of the Dead Sea, are not bitter ones. Brighton grows hazy before her dimmed sight, as she affects to view it with rapture. The bright sunshine fades before her wistful vision. It is possible that the young ladies in the Nuns' House may have to do some slight penance for those heedless words of Mr. Grewgious; some new twigs, sharp and stinging may be bound in that rod, always lying ready; a fresh handful of salt added to the pickle. But that will be all the revenge Miss Twinkleton will take on the human race for its want of appreciation. Well for mankind if all those it tramples under its cruel heel, and who turn to sting, should be so wholly free from venom.

Mr. Grewgious remains a full hour eclipsed, but at the end of that period, he allows the beams of his countenance to irradiate the deck again. He is pale, but composed. He is gently pensive, but is tranquil. In the cabin he has paid the toll demanded, and hopes to be released from further responsibility. He has been tended by the attentive Lobley, who allows his contempt for the greenness of the subject only so much license as may be gratified by supernatural grins behind the patient's back. He has imbibed drops out of a potent bottle, which has reduced his obstreperous stomach to such a state of subjection, that it no longer ventures to disturb his equanimity. He is conscious of no inside whatever, and is in a most serene state of body and mind, though—perhaps warned by his sixth sense—fighting shy of Miss Twinkleton, and putting as large a space of deck between them as is compatible with the size of the vessel.

At a sign from Mr. Tartar, Lobley presents the bottle all round as a preventive. Miss Twinkleton refuses at first with some indignation, but yields at last to the persuasions of the sea-lieutenant, and follows the universal example. She becomes immediately unconscious of an inside, and almost forgets

her sorrows. They all become, as if by magic, more lively. The spirits, which have been ebbing, rise again.

Mr. Tartar, who feels that he has been neglecting Mr. Grewgious (as indeed he has, having had eyes and ears for only one on board) repairs to the spot where that prudent gentleman has taken up his quarters, and congratulates him on his return to public life. He assures him on his honour as a sea-lieutenant, that there will be no repetition of his sufferings, and points out to him that they have passed the current which made the light ship toss and heave, and are in the smoothest of water, with the fairest of winds. He further informs Mr. Grewgious, that his yacht is named "The Seagull." The Collector of Rents says he thinks she could not have a prettier name. Mr. Tartar says nothing, but thinks he knows a much prettier one, and entertains serious thoughts (if he only dare) of rechristening her.

Lobley, who has disappeared with the potent bottle, reappears with everything necessary for a cold collation, and arranges, and lays a table, with a seaman's neatness and dexterity, upon the deck. Lobley is conscious, though with becoming modesty, that this sort of thing can only be done to



perfection on the water. He shows a gentle sympathy, and manifests a mild compassion for those unfortunates who have spent their lives on land, and who cannot conceive the bliss of a regular storm at sea. He is particularly considerate towards Mr. Grewgious, as a strong man might be towards a helpless child, and has an air about him, as if he were constantly, in imagination, patting that worthy gentleman upon the back. He flanks the table with bottles of rare wine, chosen by the sea-lieutenant for the occasion, and finally announces, with the manner of a butler-in-chief to King Neptune, that the feast is ready.

All become conscious of insides again, though only pleasantly so, and as a spur to appetite. Miss Twinkleton, who, in lieu of the faithless Mr. Grewgious, has been victimizing the good-natured Minor Canon, and making him acquainted, in a funereal voice, with certain sombre recollections of her youth, when occasions, expected to be pleasurable, turned to woe, and bright and promising mornings ended in darkest night, winds up with the trite observation, "that this is indeed a vale of tears, Mr. Chrisparkle," lets one fall, partakes of the good things before her, and is comforted. Mr. Chrisparkle, who

has deemed it a matter of courtesy not to contradict a lady, though cherishing in secret his own private ideas of life, partakes, and sees less reason than ever to change his views on the subject. Mr. Grewgious partakes, in moderation, and after due consultation with Lobley ; for whose wisdom, he informs their host in an audible whisper, he entertains the highest respect. Mr. Tartar and Rosa partake. The spirits which have been ebbing fast, rise high again.

Lobley, behind Miss Twinkleton's spare shoulders, lets fall mysterious hints of a dinner in course of preparation, more wonderful than the mind of a landsman can conceive.

He pours out a glass of wine for the good lady as he speaks, and recommends her to "tip it off," for it will do her good. She follows the recommendation, quaffs the fragrant moisture, and is heard to laugh, actually to laugh, in the valley.

Lobley pours out another glass for Mr. Grewgious, with the former manner of appearing to encouragingly pat him on the back, and the Collector of Rents, after imbibing, falls into a trance of rapturous content. He pats his stomach, more than reconciled to that member, and regards it now

only as a glorious receptacle for such celestial draughts. He shares Lobley's opinion that there is nothing like that upon the land.

They subside into their old places again. Miss Twinkleton summons that ever-ready factotum, Lobley, to her side, and requests him to initiate her into the mystery of all nautical phrases and sea-going expressions. She anticipates the time when, mounted on her throne in the "apartment allotted to study," she will recapitulate this newly-acquired information for the benefit of the young ladies, who, as the daughters of "Britannia rules the waves," ought not to be totally ignorant of such matters.

She will be able to entirely rout Miss Smith and Miss Jones, whose brothers are midshipmen, and whose knowledge of maritime affairs, acquired from these young gentlemen, she has been compelled hitherto to denounce as vulgar, in order to keep up her reputation for infallibility. For the future, this uncomfortable necessity will cease to exist.

Mr. Chrisparkle, also, in pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, is screwing up one cheerful eye, and peering with the other through a telescope. He can see nothing,

and only succeeds in inflaming his organs of vision, and contorting his pleasant face into a frightful mask, but continues to torture himself in order to make the best use of the opportunity, as others have done before him. His ruddy countenance grows ruddier than ever as he twists and contorts it into shapes which would have horrified the china shepherdess.

But nobody else takes much notice of him. Miss Twinkleton is absorbed in her new occupation. Mr. Grewgious is looking in another direction. And as for Mr. Tartar and Rosa—

What makes Mr. Grewgious—viewing them intently with screwed-up eyes—what makes him so fidgetty and restless? Is it not a pleasant sight, that delicate, girlish figure, those graceful proportions? Is it not a delight to contemplate that soft brown hair, loosened by the wind, and which, falling free over her black dress, shines there like sunshine? Or is it the figure at her side, brave, manly, and modest; frank, fearless, and unassuming—is that an object to trouble Mr. Grewgious?

No. It is the look in the sea-lieutenant's handsome face, plain even to his short-sighted eyes. He has not seen it often, but he has.

*felt* it once ; and he knows, ah ! he knows full well what it means.

Good God ! Does the child love him ? He cannot see her face, for it is turned towards the sea, but her figure is shrinking, her head downcast. He hears Miss Twinkleton expatiating on the amount of the information she has gained. He hears various cries and exclamations from the sailors. He hears Mr. Chrisparkle call him to come and look through the telescope. But he heeds none of them. He is absorbed in his anxiety to see the child's face, and read its meaning if he can. As if he were her father—and no father could feel more tenderly, more lovingly towards the little creature, whom he loves for *her* dear sake—he thinks of her at this moment only as “the child.”

At last he sees it ; pale, troubled, with the tears trembling on her dark lashes, and with quivering lips. What has he been saying to her ?

Mr. Grewgious does not wait to answer his own question, but hurries across the deck, reckless of his unhappy propensity for running foul of everything in his way, and almost capsizing the telescope and the Minor Canon ; and for the rest of the day he never leaves her side again.

No invitation from the Reverend Sept, no reproachful glance from the neglected Miss Twinkleton, can induce him to quit her for a moment.

Is it not enough to know by the brightening of her face that he is doing her service? Is it not more than enough to feel by the warm pressure of her little hand that she thanks him for coming between them? Is it not a thousand times, over and above enough to note the shadow pass from her face, and see it brighten into sunshine? And when her merry laugh breaks out again, no song of syren, no voice from land or sea, could have sounded half so pleasantly in the old man's ears.

Yet he watches Rosa anxiously many a time that day; and many a time, furtively, the sea-lieutenant. Watches him, as he paces the unsteady deck, with foot firm, and steady as a rock. Watches him, as he consoles Miss Twinkleton with a most elaborate description of their latitudes and longitudes. Watches him, as he chatters merrily of old times with the Minor Canon. Watches him, as he disappears into the tiny cabin, accompanied by his aide-de-camp, the indefatigable Lobley, and returning with the most sumptuous repast ever heard of, out of a fairy tale.

Watches him, as he proposes the health of the ladies, to be drunk in a bumper, with a wave of his hand towards the elder specimen, but with his earnest, half-reproachful gaze upon the sweet face by his side.

And still the question rises to Mr. Grew-gious' lips : As far as he is concerned there is no doubt whatever, but, does the child love him ?

For though Rosa's nervous change of colour, when the blue eyes meet hers, shows consciousness enough, yet there is always trouble in their answering gaze, and her little, trembling hand grasps her guardian's, as if beseeching him to stay beside her. Well, he can do that, at any rate.

Yet, notwithstanding this, and in spite of this, nay, perhaps, enhanced by this (we are strange and contradictory creatures, all of us), who can resist the delights of that day upon the water ?

Not Rosa ! Not Mr. Tartar ! For him, it is happiness inexpressible to be so near her. For her, it is, oh, so charming ! after the dreary days that have gone before.

Does her resolution fail her ? Oh, no, no ! But surely it is not necessary to mope and fret, in order to keep it. Is it not better and wiser to try and enjoy what is left her ?

It is impossible to feel unhappy under the revivifying influence of the fresh sea breeze. It *will* make the cheek rosier, the eye brighter, and the pulse beat more quickly and lightly. She begins to feel sure (how easy it is to believe what we wish) that he understands and respects her reticence, and is only a very little bit in love with her, after all. And now she feels so safe and so protected, with her guardian by her side.

What fun it is, when they get into the current again, to see sure-footed Mr. Chrisparkle cross the deck, so uncertain and so slow. And to see Miss Twinkleton give it up at the first step and fall plump into Lobley's tattooed arms. And to feel herself reeling and staggering like a drunken man, when she makes the experiment herself. And to hear a scream from self-possessed Miss Twinkleton when Lobley comes up with a pail, though whether because of a fancied connection between that utensil and "The Wells," or for another reason, remains unexplained. And to see that other possible reason dispelled and put to flight by Lobley's making use of the pail to mop up some water which had splashed upon the deck, as if it were never made use of for any other purpose! Oh, the fun and frolic of that day upon the water!



And to see the many vessels going by, hoisting various colours, and manned by sailors of all lands and nations ! Or to watch the ships far out at sea, and to wonder dreamily whether they are bound for foreign lands, and with what hopes and fears the bosoms of those peopling them might be filled ! Or to hear a steamboat puffing past, with music on the deck, and crowded with passengers fore and aft, merry as themselves ! Oh, the joy and pleasure of that day upon the water !

And when the sun sets, going down into the deep blue water like a ball of molten gold, dyeing the heaven deep red and purple in its passage, and lighting up the whole great ocean with reflecting tints of gold !

And in the mysterious twilight, almost windstill, when the sailors, incited by Lobley, sing snatches of wild sea-songs, weird and strange to hear ; when Mr. Tartar appears in the character of a first-rate tenor, and Mr. Chrisparkle gives them the essence of the "Alternate Musical Wednesdays," in his cheerful bass, Mr. Grewgious joining in, and, taking the will for the deed, not badly either, in the chorus ; when Rosa's fresh voice sings a sweet song of love ; and even Miss Twinkleton contributes her mite in a sentimental

ballad of her girlhood, the substance of which is, emphatically, that "Men are false, and women are fair." Oh, the happiness, and sweet, sweet peace of that day upon the water !

And when the last ray from the setting sun has faded ; when the sea grows dark ; when night comes majestic, laying a tranquilizing hand upon land and sea, as if uttering a solemn "Peace, be still !" When the stars come out slowly, one by one, shining down upon them like angels' watchful and protecting eyes ; when the moon rises in all her soft splendour, lighting up afresh the dark water with her silvery beams ; when silence falls upon them all, hushing the song upon their lips, and the only sounds they hear are the splash of a distant oar, throwing up with every touch countless treasures of silver, and the gentle wind, flapping in their sails ! Oh, the wonderful calm, and holy peace which closed that day upon the water !

It is over at last. Time flies rapidly when we would have him linger ; and when our sufferings are great, and every minute comes laden with woe unutterable, creeps as if he would lengthen our agony, and draw out to its fullest stretch, the term of our endurance. Follower of an inexorable law, no

wish can retard his course ; no prayer hasten his progress.

It is over at last. The gentlemen are gone their various ways, and Rosa and Miss Twinkleton are alone again in their lodgings. Late as it is, the elder lady would like to improve the occasion, and sombre recollections of " foolish Mr. Porter " and the vanity of earthly hopes, are rising from her bosom to her lips ; but Rosa, somewhat stormily pleading great weariness, is finally (not without a struggle) permitted to retire for the night, unimproved and unreprieved. The fight between inclination and duty has been fought out to the end, and Rosa's wishes have been conquered by Rosa's sense of duty. It ought to make her happy, ought it not ? and it were excusable, if it made her triumphant, even. But for the present, her happiness is marred and weighted by bodily and mental prostration ; and triumph loses half its attractions, viewed through a mist of tears. As she lays her weary head upon the pillow, her slight frame trembles with emotion, that is not joy, and her cheeks are wet with scalding drops, which she cannot persuade even herself to be tears of happiness.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A STIFF ENCOUNTER WITH THE BILLICKIN.

"You told me, sir," begins the new Clerk, rising from the table where he has been writing, arranging, and ordering his papers before leaving them for the day, "you told me you knew of some lodgings to suit me; will you be so kind as to tell me where?"

He addresses these words to his master, Mr. Hiram Grewgious, who has been addressing him for the last half-hour, though only with his eyes, and has received no answer.

None whatever; even though Mr. Grewgious's head is rough and red from ill-usage, and his suffering eyes appear incapable of ever being opened wide again, so continually screwed up has he kept them.

That there is some mystery behind those blue spectacles, of that he is sure. Good or bad, that young man harbours something within him, and covers it up with a face, which is a mask. And yet, though he maltreats his unoffending head to a greater extent than ever, he cannot, for the life of him, make out what it is.

He runs over in memory all the variations of his monotonous life, they have been few enough, but cannot recollect ever to have met with any one at all like him. Nay, he is sure that he has never seen him before, and yet, and yet—coming to that conclusion at last, he begins again the process of working him out in his brain, and calls back anew all the unwonted incidents of his past life, only to come to the same result once more, and yet again.

Has he any fault to find with him? Any reason to be dissatisfied? Of all the questions, which Mr. Grewgious asks himself, concerning this daily puzzle—this Mr. Brandis; this one at least he can answer fully and satisfactorily, and he does so with an emphatic no!

No! He is without exception the most perfect clerk that a man can wish for! He is always punctual, and Mr. Bazzard, of immortal memory, was not always punctual; sometimes, when lost in the mazy windings of his tragedies—far from it! (Not that Mr. Grewgious ventures, even in his own mind, to blame that lost treasure; he is conscious that a man of genius cannot be weighed in in the same balance, or meted with the same measure as a common man).

He is painstaking, industrious, patient, in a most uncommon degree. It makes Mr. Grewgious's stiff back ache with sympathy, to see him poring, as he does pore, from morning to sultry noon, and from sultry noon to night again, over his writings and accounts. When there is nothing else to do, he sets himself to acquire the science of book-keeping, with so fierce a determination to master its difficulties, and make himself at home in its mazy windings, that Mr. Grewgious sheds more perspiration in those few days than he has done in as many weeks before, and wonders—covertly watching him—whether it may not be possible, that his closely buttoned coat covers up a mystery too terrible to bear reflecting on; and that the blue spectacles are only a blind to prevent the “windows of the soul” from disclosing in an unguarded moment some awful crime.

And yet, though absorbed in his work, he is never too absorbed to attend to the wants of his new master, or to let his slightest wish pass unnoticed. He is at hand, with the mislaid pen, which Mr. Grewgious's short-sighted eyes fail to discover. He knows, as if by instinct, where the sought for book is lying. He has the door open, and is attending to a message, ere Mr. Grewgious has

heard the approaching footfall of the messenger. "In short," thinks that latter gentleman, troubled in his mind and reproachful, for, even for a moment, having harboured such dreadful suspicions, "he is spoiling me, that's where it is."

"And I'm not used to it," he continues to reflect, dissatisfied with himself for being dissatisfied, and grumbling at himself for grumbling, "and it doesn't suit me, nor my disposition. Bazzard never spoiled me. I was under training in his days, and got polished up daily. The amount of friction which I received from that talented young man, rubbed off my most prominent disagreeablenesses, and smoothed down a little my rough, unaccommodating nature. I sadly fear I shall become, in the company of this man, who lets my faults alone, and allows me to grow crooked at my pleasure, a perfect abnormity of angularness. Because he is diligent, I shall grow idle. Because he is punctual, I shall begin to think—I know I shall—a ten minutes or so later don't much matter. Because he's always taking care of me, I shall quite forget to take care of others. Six months more of this treatment and I shall be a monster. I'm on the road to it now. Here I am already har-

bouring suspicions, which are quite infamous. Suppose I, having a weak chest, or a shabby waistcoat, keep my coat buttoned, should I think it right or just, if another should conclude that behind that buttoned coat lay concealed, a demon? Suppose I, having weak eyes, which they might be, as well as short-sighted, should wear blue spectacles, and another, judging me as I have judged, should conclude, on that account, that I must be of necessity a wretch, and have underhand and wicked motives for so doing, should I think it just and right again? O, Bazzard, Bazzard! I little thought how much I lost in you! You were suspicious of everybody; of course therefore, I was obliged to defend them. You were always low-spirited and moping; all the more need for me to be bright and lively. You were rarely punctual—hardly ever, I may say; all the more necessary for me to be always at my post. You let me feel on all occasions how intellectually inferior I was to you; how excellent a sustenance for my humility! You would not stand one word of reproof, or hint thereof; what a capital reason and necessity for me to keep a strict watch upon my temper! You rarely worked, Bazzard, having your mind full of something better; no danger, therefore, of my



growing idle! Who knows what excellencies another year or two of you might have developed in me? Who can foretell what may be the fatal consequence to my character of constant communication with this man?

"Will you be so kind," repeats the young man, "as to tell me where?"

"Ha!" says Mr. Grewgious, rubbing his eyes and coming out of his reverie, "it is true; I never told you where. Well, it is a fine afternoon, and my legs are cramped from sitting, so if you will put up with the ambling and remarkably unæsthetical gait of an angular man, we will go there together."

"I should be very much obliged," responds the new clerk, "but I fear to give you trouble. You are so good and generous to me that I fear to impose on your kindness."

"Now don't say that," ejaculates Mr. Grewgious with dismay, "don't 'ee say that. I'm not a naturally bad man, I hope, though angular; distorted," says the worthy man, with a penitent remembrance of his late reflections, "both in mind and body. Mr. Bazzard improved me very much, but you are undoing it as fast as ever you can. I cannot stand praise," continues Mr. Grewgious with great energy, "I'm morally far too weak to be able to. You are

a well-read man, I don't doubt, and your natural philosophy—or whatever it is—must have taught you that to smooth a rough surface you must use friction—must oppose to it, in short, another rough surface. Ah, I fear you are far too smooth for me, and instead of helping to polish me, I shall only roughen you."

"I am grieved," says the young man, dejectedly, "to have given you dissatisfaction. I am afraid you think that my manner, which, in deference to your age, and as suitable to my position, I have endeavoured to make modest and unassuming, is underhand, and perhaps sly. I have not meant it to be so. I have tried, and I will try—harder yet—to please you and to merit your confidence."

"There you go again," responds Mr. Grewgious, grasping his innocent head in his despair, and punishing it severely. "Don't you see that's just what you ought not to do. We aint master and clerk in this matter, which is a private one, you see (or, rather, ought to see): this evening we are friends. I have a lady to recommend as having lodgings to let, and you (if they suit you) are going to patronise us both by taking them—her directly, me indirectly. Do you understand, now?"

The young man makes no answer, unless the look of almost reverent affection which he directs towards his companion may be interpreted as such, and a something which makes his blue spectacles dimmer than before, shutting out even the feeble light which they admit.

“And now,” continues Mr. Grewgious more cheerfully, “being upon this footing, and finding ourselves—which I am sure I do—much more at our ease there, tell me where you have been staying these last few nights? What with pic-nicings, and yachtings, and bad habits lately acquired, I’m afraid I have been neglecting you.”

“I have been lodging at a small inn behind Holborn,” replies Mr. Brandis, “and, although the accommodation is very simple, to remain there would be beyond my means.”

“Very true; and more shame for me,” remarks Mr. Grewgious, and then relapses into silence, during which they walk on quietly together, the younger man assisting the other so surely and effectually in crowded passings, and guiding him so judiciously and with due consideration for his angles, that Mr. Grewgious is more than ever convinced he will inevitably be the ruin of him.

They have sighted Bloomsbury Square,

when the Collector of Rents, who has cast one or two anxious glances towards his companion, begins again, somewhat nervously—

“They are excellent rooms, those apartments I mentioned to you,” he says, with a vivid remembrance of the damp and the awful fate foretold by the Billickin, that the time would come when a drenched sop would be no name for you “and cheap, too, but—but—”

He pauses, conscience stricken, as that other terrible danger connected with “your jistes”—not the less terrific, because totally incomprehensible—falls heavy on his mind, and he feels that if anything should happen to the young man under that roof to which he is introducing him, his blood will call loud for vengeance to descend—and right it should, too,—on his ill-starred and luckless head.

He had meant the young man as a peace-offering for the Billickin; a plaster, so to speak, for her matronly bosom, rent by the abrupt departure of Miss Twinkleton and his ward; but he remembers now, as his conscience rises and his courage falls, that there are two sides to every question, and that there may be more danger in bearding the lioness in her den than in running the risk of meeting her unawares, inflamed by righteous

wrath, upon the highway. To use a homely expression, he fears that, in trying to escape from the slow torture of the frying pan, he may alight into the glowing fury of the fire.

He has never seen this redoubtable female since the occasion when he handed over the money agreed upon for the lodgings, accompanied by a pretty large addition as a peace-offering. On that memorable opportunity, the Billickin had been deaf, dumb, and blind. She had heard nothing of the approach of the cab which was to convey them away. She was totally unconscious of Miss Twinkleton's request that one of the servants might help her with the packages. She was lost to the voice of the charmer, when Rosa timidly requested her to bear them in kind remembrance. She paid no heed whatever to Mr. Grewgious' conciliatory words. She totally ignored the cabman. It was doubtful whether the forms of the two ladies, upon which her cold eyes were fixed, were regarded by her as stone walls or thin air, but it was certain that they made no other impression on her retina.

Yet Mr. Grewgious had hastened their entrance into the vehicle, and had privately given the driver a double fee to drive fast, guided by an unerring instinct that this fatal

calm was only a prelude to the fury of the tempest—the quiet of the volcano previous to the terrors of the eruption. And, as a sob broke the seal of silence which the Billickin had impressed upon her chaste lips, he retired trembling, as if he had heard the first mutterings of the thunder.

No wonder, therefore, that, as the moment draws nigh when he is to enter the back parlour and encounter the dreaded presence, his soul sinks within him, and he seeks for some tangible reason to abandon the enterprise. The danger, which had appeared so insignificant in the distance, grows formidable and overwhelming near at hand. He even doubts whether his new clerk will be accepted, or even if he should be, whether that will not be the worse that could happen.

But it is too late to withdraw. At the very moment when his fortitude is abandoning him, he has double need of fortitude, for the door of the house upon which his troubled eyes are fixed, and which his troubled soul is haunting, opens suddenly, and the Billickin, attired for walking, and accompanied by a very fat cook, with a large market basket on her stout red arm, issues therefrom.

No help for him now ; no use to shuffle behind his clerk, and endeavour to conceal

himself behind that slender figure. The sharp eye of the Billickin pierces through all such attempts at concealment, and has him down in a winking.

“Well, I never!” exclaims the relict of the departed Billickin, in the shrillest and most uncompromising of voices, “if it aint Mr. Grewgious! It’s give me quite a turn, for I never should ha’ thought as he’d a had the face to look in mine after all that’s ’appened. I won’t go so fur as to call it cheek” (more shrilly still) “on account of having been brought up genteel; but face, I must, and will.”

Another might have called it, and far more correctly, back; for Mr. Grewgious still remains petrified in the awkward position in which he has been brought down, his baffled effort to hide himself, painfully obvious to every one, and neither ventures to turn round nor meet her angry eye.

“Ameliar,” continues the Billickin, no longer shrilly, but alarmingly faintly, apostrophising the fat-faced cook, who has been expressing her astonished indignation behind Mr. Grewgious’ back at his barefacedness, by pantomimic gestures, “put down that there market-basket, you unfeeling ’ussy! and stand ready to ketch me if I fall, for,” she

gasps, "if ever there was an occasion where a sensitive female must go off, and can't help doing of it for ever so, this is that occasion."

Mr. Grewgious, recovering some small portion of his presence of mind in his mortal agony at hearing of this intention—knowing that wherever she goes he will be made accountable for it—emerges from his ignoble position, firstly, to implore her not to go, and secondly, to explain that there is no need to do it, for that his mission is one of peace and goodwill.

But before he can speak, she interposes, sarcastically—

"Pray, sir, put yourself to no ill-convenience, which is thrown away upon me, as is not liable to be imposed upon, although only a female, and as sich, inferior to you, naterally" (with a laugh, in which Ameliar joins triumphantly). "If it's a bag as you're come for, you're welcome to it, I'm sure (I wouldn't touch it with a pair o' tongs myself), and have no need to insult a respectable female who pays her rent and taxes reglar; quite as reglar, and perhaps a little more so, as if she was a man."

(Great triumph on the part of Ameliar, who seems to think this is a crusher indeed).

"Why, I says to Ameliar—who's a standing



there, and can testify to it—only this very morning, I says : blest if I don't believe that old bag o' bones (which she is, sir, and ready to take my affidavit to it) have a left that old scarecrow of a bag behind, only to have a hopportunity of a poking her precious nose (which if I had a nose at all, should be a Christian one) once more into these apartments, and insulting a honest widder, which always was a respectable member of Society and the Hestablishment, and would scorn to enter a tabbynacular or any hother low place of that description ; and which *is* a widder, though unbeknown to the riff-raff ; which she never was, and never will be, for all her pokings and her prying's."

Now this is not even Greek to Mr. Grewgious—for he still retains a dim and shadowy remembrance of that language, and the sufferings it brought upon him in his boyhood—but Chinese or double Dutch, or any other dialect utterly unknown to him ; he cannot understand a syllable of it, and turns helplessly to his clerk for help.

That young man, therefore, entering the arena, the B. directs towards him the full current of her wrath.

"I am not aweer," she says, "that I ever had the ple—asure of a setting eyes on you

before, young man; and if you have sense enough to take good advice (though not looking like it), I'd recommend you to make yourself scarce, and not put your fingers into a pie which wasn't baked for you. You might be sorry for it arterwards. But if you are acting for a party, which my regard for truth will *not* allow me to call a lady, then I says in presence of that gentleman, who, till now, I have always looked upon as sich" (the B.'s feelings overcome her as she contemplates that lost sheep, desperately tearing at his wool), "more shame for you, a decent, well-growed young man, though wearing glasses, which reminds me of my departed Billickin, who took to spectacles, poor dear! before the Lord took him."

This reminiscence of her lost lord proving too heavy for the sensitive feelings of the widow, she sinks under it, and, melting into tears, weeps profusely on Ameliar's sympathetic shoulder; while that corpulent damsel, drawing out a huge pocket-handkerchief, effectually seconds her mistress by alternately rubbing up therewith the spasmodically affected nose of the Billickin and her own. Ameliar has been a most interested spectator of the scene, expanding her fat face into a delighted grin when the gentlemen—and

serve 'em right!—were most catching it, or squeezing an incipient tear out of her eye when her mistress's feelings grew too big for utterance. Ameliar's sentiments towards the stronger sex were formerly of a more kindly nature, but have been changed into sentiments of the bitterest animosity ever since the sergeant, who was more than particular in his attentions, especially when a ham was "in cut," or a fresh barrel of beer tapped, had abandoned her substantial charms, and taken up with a 'ousemaid from round the corner—a wasp-waisted hussy with no figure at all. Since that time she loathes the sex, and has even gone so far as to "wish the earth were rid of 'em." But that extreme may have been induced by the circumstance, naturally to the highest degree exasperating, of having just before seen the two reprobates pass by—"oh, the wile slut!"—arm in arm.

"Now don't 'ee, missus," sobs Ameliar. "Bear up again it, do, there's a good soul! 'Tis a breakin' of my 'art to 'ear you! Lor' a mussy on us!" says Ameliar, "she's a going."

Nevertheless, she does not go yet. It is a characteristic of this remarkable female, never, under any circumstances whatever, to do what is expected of her. She immediately

returns, therefore, on the very verge of going ; opens her eyes ; sobs like the first throb of an earthquake ; bids Ameliar “hold her noise,” and looks about her.

A few passers-by, attracted by Ameliar’s cries, have collected round them, and are looking on with that eager, delighted interest in a “row” always manifest on such occasions. The Billickin, rightly judging that Ameliar is the proximate cause of this assembly, gives that sympathetic damsel a month’s warning on the spot, and declares her emphatic determination to give her no character.

For however agreeable under other circumstances this manifestation of popular sympathy might have been, on the present occasion it does not chime in with the plans of the Billickin. Not only have the gentlemen not sufficiently “caught it,” but they may have come for some other reason than the one she has attributed to them, and she does not wish to quite frighten them away.

She looks round, therefore, for some one in the crowd to be made an example of, and naturally chooses for that laudable purpose the smallest and weakest of the lot. In the twinkling of an eye, she has neighbour’s little Johnny by the collar—who is looking on with

innocent wonder—and is shaking him until he loses all distinct consciousness as to which part of him is head and which heels.

Silly little Johnny! When will you learn that the part you are expected to play on the world's great stage is always to be out of the way, except when you are old enough to be of use in it? Did you think, perhaps, that your blue eyes hardly suited the paleness of your cheeks, which ought to be by right rosy red?

They are red enough now, at any rate! The cuffs which make them so have echoed through Bloomsbury Square just as Ameliar's cries had done, although producing an entirely different effect. For whereas the sounds issuing from her had lured passers-by to linger, these other sounds warn them to depart. Johnny's subdued cries have hardly found utterance, when the crowd (consisting principally of men and boys; women would not have cleared the field so easily), seeing in what a dangerous direction the wind lay, remember that they have business elsewhere, and disappear. Bloomsbury Square becomes itself again.

"There, take that, and that, you young wretch," says the B., "though it's my belief as no amount of beating will make you better."

(Probably not. A little less might do it, though.)

“Will you make off with yourself, or will you not?” says the B., “for if you won’t, I’ll know the reason why.”

Anyone might know that, for she is still holding him by the collar, and is shaking and bumping him as if he were a feather bed, and would be all the plumper for the process.

Luckless Johnny, who seems to have been sent into the world to afford a surface of cheek, upon which irritated females might give vent to their feelings, utters between his sobs an ardent wish to be allowed to make off with himself as speedily as possible, and promises, with an earnestness admitting of no doubt as to his sincerity, not to return.

“Then, get along with you,” says the B., with a final jerk, and a final mark of her esteem, in the shape of her four fingers and thumb, “and let me see your back immediate.”

Johnny obeys her to the letter, taking good care to present only a back view of himself to her observation, until he is lost in obscurity.

Having thus satisfactorily disposed of the crowd, the B. is now at liberty again to bestow her undivided attention on the gentle-

men, who have been looking on in helpless anguish. Mr. Grewgious' ears, in particular, are as red from sympathy as if they had been boxed too.

The B. is a little warm from the exertion, but having given vent to her outraged feelings, is far more amicably disposed than at first. Mr. Brandis is quick to take advantage of this circumstance.

"Excuse me, dear madam," he says; "but there must be some fatal mistake which has taken possession of your mind, and which predisposes you against us. You have alluded to a bag—"

"To a bag o' bones," interposes the Billickin, still defiantly; "and to a bag, worked in beads, and left behind."

"Certainly, dear madam. But allow me to explain that our presence here to-day has nothing whatever to do with a bag, as you seem to suppose."

"Nothing whatever," says Mr. Grewgious.

"Well, I *was* surprised," says the B., somewhat mollified. "I would have sent a erring boy myself."

(She means an errand boy, and not an erring one, although she holds to the old-fashioned and wholesome belief that boys,

those small mistakes of nature, are always erring, and always needing punishment for their errors.)

Now, it happens that the Billickin, on sighting the gentlemen, had immediately come to the conclusion that they were meditating an attack.

Like a skilful general, therefore, she could not be satisfied with simply remaining on the defensive, but promptly proceeded to the aggressive; considering, with right, that by so doing you attain at once a superior footing, and greatly augment your chances of victory.

She begins to fear now that her courage has oversprung her judgment, and that she has been knocking down friends instead of enemies. Her method of making good again what she has spoiled, is one peculiar to her sex, and highly to be recommended. She holds out no hand of amity as yet, but pummels them on another side for a change.

“There now,” she continues, “that’s just the crooked natur of gentlemen. I don’t know what the world would come to if we wern’t there to keep things straight. Why, I should like to know, couldn’t you have told me at once what you came for? One would think you hadn’t got no tongue in your heads.



Though, for the matter o' that, the men might have been born without 'em for all the use they make of 'em. I could hold out for a couple of hours on a stretch, with Billickin, without getting a word of answer.

(Mr. Grewgious thinks that the suffering attendant on the transit into another world must not have been without its alleviations for that departed one).

This new and unexpected attack, having the effect desired, and completely bewildering the victims, Mrs. Billickin grows gracious, and, first bidding Amelia go on her errand alone, begs them to enter the house with her, and there make known their wishes.

"Into the back parlour, sir," she says, addressing Mr. Grewgious, "which, though humble, is always open to friends any hour of the day."

"Pray take seats, gentlemen. And before proceeding to business, let me relieve my heart of what you, Mr. Grewgious, with your knowledge of the fineness of my sensibilities, might call a load. There may be people who, behind my back (I should like to hear 'em venture to do it to my face), says: she draws it too fine; her sensitiveness is that delicate that she wounds the feelings of other people, in giving utterance to her own. There may

be sich. I forgives 'em. My heart (grasping it with energy) is able to forgive even sich. But I never forgits. No, Mr. Grewgious, don't ask me for to do it; for—though appy to obleege you otherwise—I never can nor will."

Both gentlemen, not in the least knowing what to say to this peroration, follow the wise example of the departed Billickin, and sit it out in silence.

The B., no whit discomfited by this, but rather regarding it as an involuntary tribute to her unattainable superiority in eloquence, continues—

"Your sharp hies, Mr. Grewgious (poor, short-sighted gentleman!), will have discovered that underneath the current of my remarks, and hinfluencing of 'em, is a bag, left behind by an elderly party, whom I must still decline to mention more particklar, not having no acquaintance with her, thank Evin! but which, when I explain that she is a complete scarecrow, must become as aperient to you as it is to me; because you, sir, introduced her to me and my apartments."

Mr. Grewgious, fidgetting uneasily on his chair, feels that the case is assuming again a bad aspect for him.

"I do not even imagine," says the B., loftily, "that there exists a creetur who would

go for to say that I should wish to retain that bag. I have *not* such a low opinion of my fellow-creeturs as that! Bagses," she continues, excitedly, "particular, bagses as belongs to scarecrows, is viewed with loathing in this respectable establishment, and no one would stoop to pick 'em up, for ever so."

Mr. Grewgious begs to inform her that he is certain of that.

"Well," says the B., "under them circumstances, I am willing to overlook the past, and to say that no offence being intended, none is took. For I am of that open natur which cannot abear concealments and outs with it at once; which sometimes it would be better to be silent, and no wish to say it wouldn't. And now," she concludes, with her hand upon her heart, "all disagreeablenesses having been cleared away, we finds ourselves, and may we hever remain so, the very best of friends."

Mr. Grewgious brightens visibly.

"And what, gentlemen, may be the hobject of your present visit?" she enquires, "since I was mistook."

The clerk explains that his friend and employer, Mr. Grewgious, has informed him that she has certain rooms to let; and that he would wish to rent those rooms, if they

should suit him, and if she will accept him as a lodger."

The B. smiles at him quite benignantly; Mr. Grewgious grows radiant, and even through the heavy sadness which makes part and parcel of the clerk, bursts a fitful ray of light.

It makes him so much younger, handsomer, wholesomer (if one may use the word), that Mr. Grewgious' eyes rest upon him with wonder, and, strange to say, also with alarm. For again he feels an almost overpowering dread of the mystery, which, in dread contrast to his many excellencies, surrounds this man.

Again, an unutterable terror rests upon him, as he vaguely wonders what sort of face will appear before his vision, when that one he wears at present is cast aside—that face, which is a mask.

Again, as the lost boy comes back to his memory, in all the vitality and freshness of his early manhood, he seems to feel—as he has often done of late, in the silent watches of the night—the ghost of that murdered youth lay an icy hand upon his heart.

"And my generous employer," continues Mr. Brandis, looking at him gratefully,—“I have lately become his clerk,—will be so kind as to give me a reference.”

He little knows what sombre shadows of himself have been gathering in his master's brain, nor how speedily for the time, those few words, warm from his heart, disperse them.

"Indeed I will," says Mr. Grewgious, heartily ashamed of himself for constantly harbouring such undefined, yet base suspicions of one whose conduct is without reproach. "He is the best clerk I ever had in my life. Quite a treasure, I assure you. I am a most remarkably angular man, madam, as you have no doubt long since observed; and an imposition on society, not being formed for it; but, perhaps, I might be put up with, in my corner, if he didn't spoil me. And that's the only fault I have to find with him, that he does spoil me. I ought to stay in my corner," says Mr. Grewgious, shaking his head in mournful disapproval of himself, "and never allow myself to be induced to come out of it; for when I do, I am perfectly certain to run foul of something or somebody in a manner—to put it angularly, and it is impossible for me to put it otherwise—perfectly appalling."

"A good deal depends on bringing up," says the B., shaking her head, not in negation, but in emphatic corroboration of the truth of

his words, and looking as if she would like to have brought him up, and that the process, though making of him, no doubt, a brilliant acquisition to society, might have been hardly quite agreeable to his feelings, either bodily or mental.

“And I only wish to add, in conclusion,” says Mr. Grewgious, “before retiring from the conversation—and I am sure you cannot wish more heartily to exclude me from it, than I do to quit it—that I can highly recommend my clerk, and believe you will have no occasion to repent, if you allow him to become an inmate of your house. Though, speaking of clerks,” he adds, with a terrified remembrance that his lost genius is a relative of the Billickin, “of course I do not include Mr. Bazzard. I look upon him as a unity—a unity, madam.”

Mrs. Billickin, supposing from his manner that this is intended as a compliment, “’opes he do, in her presence.”

“As a unity, madam. Why, I should as soon venture to include Mr. Bazzard in any species of clerks whatever, as I should, to compare myself to—to—Her most gracious Majesty, our sovereign lady, the Queen; God bless her!” He rises reverently as he speaks, with his hand upon his heart.

There is so much high-bred courtesy in his manner, shining brightly through his awkwardness ; so much true and tender reverence for the lady, still more than for the sovereign, that his clerk's heart warms towards him more than ever. The Billickin remains impassive, her feelings always rather inclining to the stormy than the sentimental.

"I suppose you means them rooms, sir," she says, "at the top of the house, which I traped up the stairs to show you, when you fust come here with that pretty dear, Miss Rosa?"

It is well for the master that he does not heed the sudden and violent change in his clerk's face. He might have slept the worse for it that night.

It is over in a moment. Like a flash of lightning, it has quivered, blue, intense, upon his face. Like a flash of lightning it is gone again, leaving the darkness, deeper, denser, more sombre, for its momentary presence there. And the pallid face is shrouded again in a gloom more impossible to penetrate.

"And I suppose," continues the B., "that you mean to stand responsible for the regular payment of the lodgings, sir. Well, it will ill become me as a widder,—dependent on my own exertions, and which exertions is so

great, that no mortal, no, nor hangels neither, can conceive 'em ; my motto always having a been : Susanner, (so named after a haunt, as was that miserly, though looked up to different, as to die and leave nothing behind, and wish I had her here to give her a piece of my mind for so doing) Susanner, work till you falls down in a swownd, and then go on working still ; and done it too,—to turn up my nose to such a hoffer. Nor would I have believed, sir," suddenly addressing Mr. Grewgious with great asperity, "as you would have expected me to run agin my own face to that extent."

Although not clearly seeing how she would accomplish this feat, Mr. Grewgious begs her not to try, and assures her, with great earnestness, that such are his intentions.

"And as fur as personal character goes," says the B., regarding the young man with astonishing approbation, "the gentleman's 'face is his fortun,' as the song says, and well I remember Billickin a singing of it, reluding to me, and that hoarse afterwards, as no amount of mustard plasterses on his chest could bring back his voice agin ; though beauty is but skin deep, and transitory, and no ways to the point, which would say, am quite agreeable to taking of him at terms,



which raly air, and no denyin' of it, dirt cheap."

"Then, will you be so kind," says Mr. Grewgious, insinuatingly, "as to show us the rooms, so that my clerk may satisfy himself as to their suiting him."

He says it insinuatingly, for he is doubtful how the suggestion may be received, and his conscience will not allow him to be a party to inveigling his clerk into lodgings without his having seen and approved of them.

His instinct has not deceived him. His timid suggestion kindles into lively fire again the decaying embers of her wrath.

"Raly," she exclaims, in hot indignation, "unless I had heerd it with my own ears, I should never have believed that a being, with human feelings in his bussem, could have had the 'eart to propose, that a female, agitated with bagges and base himputations, and all of a tremble, should clamber and climb up them stairs, which is steep, and may as well know it first as last, and palpitations that wiolent, as the doctor says is reciprocal disease, and certain to carry me off when them around me least expects it, and might be sorry for it, when too late. For then no weepings and wailings," she continues, "nor idiotic smoothings of the

head," (Mr. Grewgious has resorted as usual in his remorse, to that remedy), "can ever bring me back again," bursting into tears. "One would raly think you had been born without a mother!"

Now although this last remark favours Mr. Grewgious' theory of having been born a chip, he takes it cruelly to heart, and seems, by his mournful and appealing gaze, to beseech the injured woman to mercifully withdraw it, and allow him this one link of connection with humanity.

Then the clerk, seizing an opportunity when the Billickin's sobs grow less heart-rending, interposes.

Mr. Grewgious does not take in what he says, but it proves remarkably efficacious, for though the B., still weeps, her tears are mild and gentle, and she subsides, from a roaring lion, into the meekest of lambs.

"Which my natur," she says, "is that of a worm, and only turns when trod upon; and a hard word can break my 'eart," holding it, as if it really were in fragments, "and done it often; so, being wishful to have a 'at and stick constant in the passage, which Billickin's is pretty nigh wore out through having hung there so many years, as a warning to the riff-raff, am free to confess, that I will make any

terms whatever as is reasonable, and 'ope we may come to an agreement."

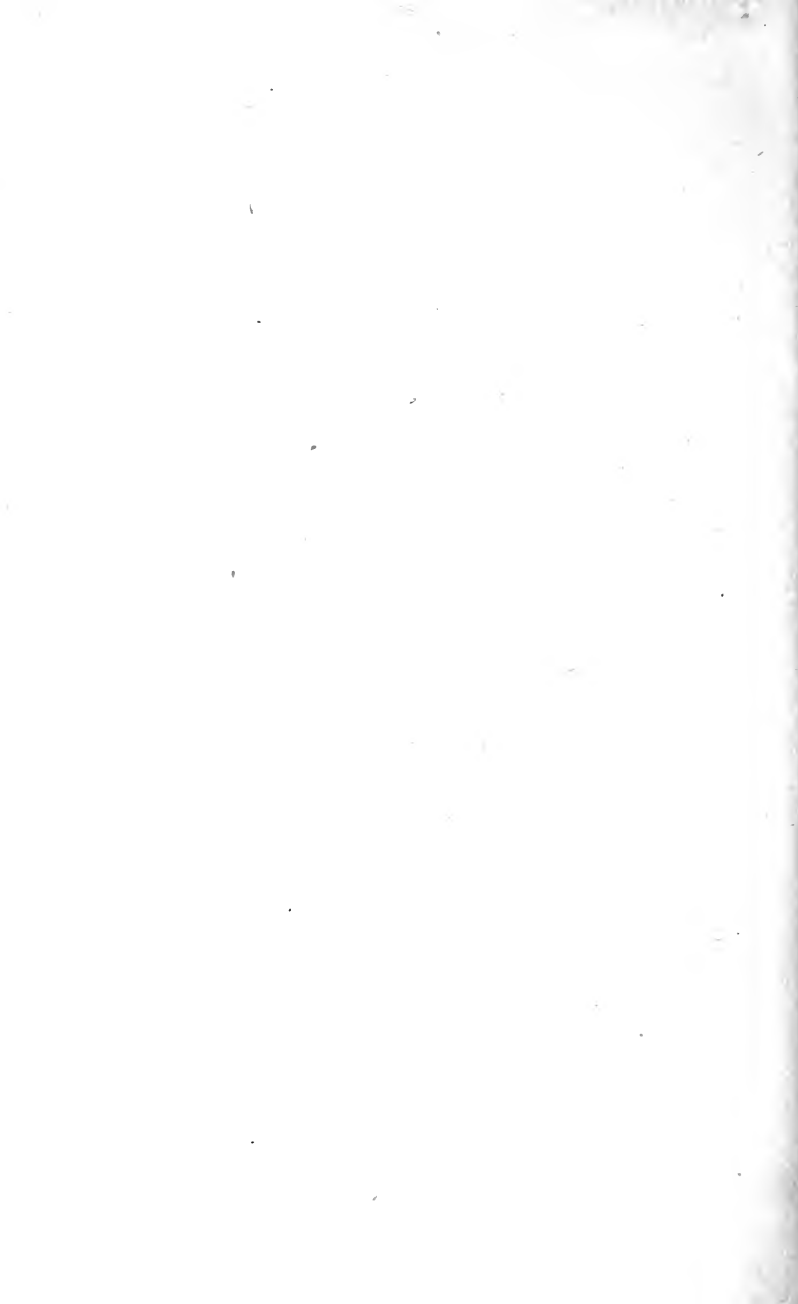
So they settle it between themselves. The clerk is quite willing to take the rooms without having seen them. Is totally indifferent as to the probability of becoming a "dripping sop" once in a way; and even gas-fitting over his jistes causes him no keen anxiety. Is quite satisfied with a breakfast of tea or coffee, and bread and butter, with a rasher if convenient; and has no objection to the same evening diet, minus rasher and plus a bit of cold meat from dinner. Will provide his own beer and "sperrits." Dines in town. Finally pays his first instalment, promises to come for good, to-morrow, and convoys Mr. Grewgious, who has not uttered a syllable since his total exclusion from all connection with humanity, out into the street again.

Evening, the evening of a great city, has come upon them. Up in the peaceful sky, the stars shine out unheeded, one by one. And going out of Bloomsbury Square, they come into the brightness of Holborn, noisy with a myriad echoing footsteps, and lit up with a myriad jets of light.

END OF VOL. I.

















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